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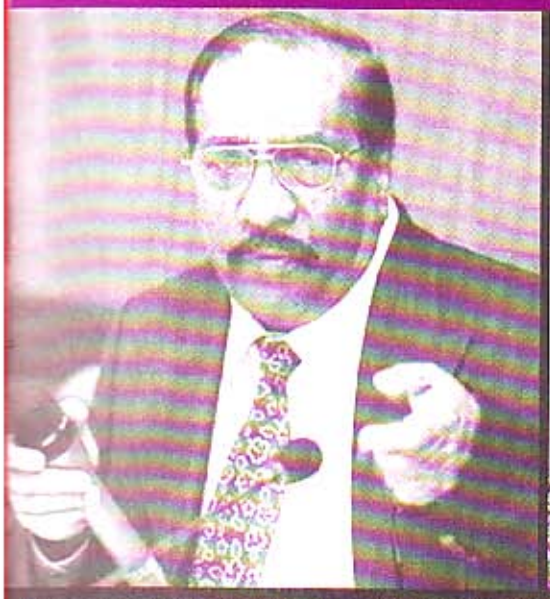

Anton Balasingham of the LTTE and Mrs Ferial Ashraff and Nimal Siripala de Silva of the Govt delegation (top Government and LTTE Negotiators with Norwegian facilitators Eric Solheim and Vidar Helgessen and Swiss Director of Foreign Affairs(below) ;

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- Voltaire

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The issue 'Tamil paramilitary groups'

Many welcomed the outcome of the talks between the Government and the LTTE in Geneva last month primarily because the prospect of an all out war breaking out had been averted at least for the time being. Both sides hailed it as a victory for their respective delegations. The Norwegians thought that the result had exceeded their expectations.

Figuring prominently in the talks has been the LTTE's charge against the Government that it has failed to disarm Tamil "paramilitary groups" in compliance with the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA). Not only had the LTTE included its breakaway 'Karuna Group', but also long recognised Tamil political parties like the EPRLF, EPDP and PLOTE in its list of "paramilitaries" submitted at the Geneva talks. However, the latter three Tamil parties have vigorously rejected the characterisation of them as 'paramilitaries' and in turn charged that the LTTE was seeking to physically and politically eliminate them to bolster up its claim of being the "sole representative" of the Tamil people. The LTTE also had alleged that there were Muslim 'Jihadi' groups operating in the east of the country. Muslim political leaders have described this allegation as unsubstantiated and preposterous.

There is no doubt that the CFA, with all its faults and violations, had by and large held preventing the resumption of armed hostilities between the LTTE and government forces over the last three years. However during these same years the internecine conflicts among Tamil groups and parties had continued unabated. The killings and counter-killings during these years between the various armed actors in the North-East have claimed hundreds of lives from across the political spectrum. The emergence of the 'Karuna Group' following the defection of the LTTE's eastern commander has further compounded the problem particularly in the context of the LTTE's unwillingness to recognise or allow it to function as a separate entity. Since that split the LTTE and its rebel faction have been engaged in an orgy of mutual slaughter.

The objective of the LTTE in highlighting the issue of 'paramilitary groups' is self evidently political and military. It regards and wants the northern and eastern provinces of the island recognised as one undivided "Tamil homeland". Karuna hailing from the east has raised the flag of eastern regionalism thereby seeking to undermine the LTTE's concept of Tamil homeland. Militarily Karuna and his loyalists pose a serious challenge to the LTTE's quest for hegemony in the east.

In Geneva, the Government agreed to take "all necessary measures in accordance with the Ceasefire Agreement to ensure that no armed group or person other than government security forces will carry arms or conduct armed operations." It is certain that when the parties meet in Geneva next April, the LTTE will raise the issue again.

It is imperative that the issue of disarmament has to be addressed within the larger framework of human rights and security. Otherwise the selective targeting of 'paramilitaries' can be seen as part of a sinister campaign to deny them political space, eliminate opposition and to suppress dissenting voices. Non-LTTE Tamil groups such as the EPDP, EPRLF and PLOTE, which had their armed cadres disarmed, have with justification complained that their cadres and supporters have been gunned down in the hundreds from the time the CFA came into effect in February 2002.

The Government may, in accordance with what was agreed at Geneva, take steps to disarm the Karuna group and prevent it from carrying "arms or conduct armed operations" from government controlled territory, but its cadres may choose not to consent to be integrated into the Sri Lankan security forces as envisaged in Clause 1.8 of the CFA. Instead, they may want to function as a legitimate political group or a party in which case how and who will guarantee their individual rights and personal security is a question that needs to be addressed.

Thus there is a clear need to link the issue of disarmament to the adoption of a comprehensive human rights accord that guarantees individual, human and democratic rights and more specifically prevents the 'disarmed' from becoming victims of assassinations, abductions, extortion, intimidation and harassment. Such an accord, if properly adhered to, will hopefully enable the opening up of space for democratic political activity in the North-East where the lack of such space has been an entrenched feature since the 1980s.

An alternative in the interim would be to persuade the LTTE to seek and secure a ceasefire and a political accommodation with other Tamil groups and parties recognising their democratic right to exist and function. The Norwegian facilitators may be well advised to consider promoting such a development that will positively contribute to the overall peace process being taken forward.

NEWS REVIEW

Norway will continue as peace facilitator

Mar 10 – Despite the vociferous call by its political allies, JVP and JHU, that Norway should be either removed as facilitator or its role in the peace process must be downsized, the government headed by President Mahinda Rajapakse appears to have taken a firm decision that Norway will continue in its present role and that it has no intention of getting rid of Norwegian facilitation in the peace process.

Cabinet spokesman and Media Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa when asked at the Cabinet media briefing on March 9 whether the government would in keeping with the JVP's demand replace Norway as the facilitator, said that no such decision has been taken adding, "Political parties can state their positions, but the government has certain international obligations."

Yapa, said that Norway would remain and there was no change whatsoever in the government's position regarding that country's role as peace talks facilitator.

The JVP' propaganda secretary, a day after the All Party Conference and having welcomed the Geneva peace talks in principle, Mr Wimal Weerawansa speaking in parliament on Tuesday (7) said that Norway should be removed from its facilitation role, however difficult it was to make such a decision, since it was acting in a way to provide international recognition to pseudo Tamil Eelam calim by the LTTE. He said that the mandate given to President Mahinda Rajapakse did not permit Norway to liquidate Sri Lanka. He described the red carpet welcome given to the LTTE delegation that visited Norway after the CFA review talks in Geneva as that befitting a state delegation.

"This is a dangerous moment. Norway is jeopardizing the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. There is no basis for Norway to give the LTTE delegation the status of state leaders. This is a mean act similar to a cricket umpire hosting a tea party only for one team during the tea break of the game," he said.

Mr. Weerawansa charged that Norway's aim was to drag the peace process for another two years, and give international recognition to Tamil Eelam, while promoting Tigers as leaders from official states, as done in the case of East Timor.

Mr. Weerawansa also accused a local Sunday newspaper of endangering national security and the lives of security forces personnel by giving publicity to LTTE propaganda. He said that while the JVP stood for media freedom, it also believed the sovereignty and integrity of the motherland must be given priority over media freedom.

New Norwegian peace envoy to visit Sri Lanka

Mar 17 - The newly appointed Special Envoy to Sri Lanka is likely to visit the island shortly for talks with the government and the Tamil Tigers ahead of the next round of peace talks in Geneva next month..

With the announcement that Erik Solheim would step down, the Norwegian government has appointed Mr Jon Hanssen-Bauer as Special Envoy in regard to the peace process in Sri Lanka. However it is learnt that Erik Solheim, now the Minister for International Development in the Norwegian government, and who has been playing a pivotal role in the peace process since 1998 and was instrumental in brokering a February 2002 cease-fire agreement between the Government and the LTTE, will continue to remain in overall charge of the Norwegian facilitation of the peace process.

Mr Solheim told journalists in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, that the reason for his stepping down was the heavy workload following his ministerial appointment and not to anybody's political pressure. However, he insisted that though he was stepping down as chief facilitator, he would still lead efforts to progress the peace process in Sri Lanka. he said. "I will still be involved in Sri Lanka, but not in the same day-to-day way, I will continue to be in charge of the Norwegian process in Sri Lanka," he said at a news conference in Oslo. "I will participate in the (April 19-21) peace talks in Geneva as head of the Norwegian group, I will travel back and forth to Sri Lanka, I will have tight contact with the parties by telephone, but we need a person in addition to follow Sri Lanka from second to second," he said.

The new Special Envoy, Hanssen-Bauer, reportedly has wide experience in peace building and was one of the key advisor's in the Middle East peace process. He has also worked in Haiti, China and Latin America. He subsequently joined the Norwegian foreign ministry and has been working on strategy related to peace building. Hanssen-Bauer will be apart of the Norwegian team when the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE meet for talks on April 19-21 in Geneva, the officials said.

Muslims insist on separate representation

Mar 8 - Leaders of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka are demanding that in all future peace talks, their community should enjoy independent separate representation.

Following a round-table discussion among the leaders, they said in press release on 8 March, "The representatives of Muslim Civil Society and the Political Leadership which met at a round-table discussion has reiterated its demand for a separate independent delegation to represent the Muslim interest at any future talks between the GOSL and the LTTE.

"The round-table discussion was organised by the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka and held at the Hotel Taj Samudra yesterday, 7th March '06, for Minister Ferial Ashraff, who was a member of the GOSL delegation at the talks held in Geneva to brief the Muslim Political Leadership and representatives of the Civil Society on the Geneva Talks with special reference to the Muslim concerns.

"Minister Ferial Ashraff, also briefed on the discussions she had with members of the LTTE delegation including Mr. Anton Balasingham and Mr. Tamil Chelvan with special reference to the Muslims concerns on the side lines of the talks

"The SLMC Leader Rauff Hakeem spoke on his experience he has had in dealing with the members of the LTTE delegations during the rounds of peace talks in the past.

"Misister Rishard Badiudeen, Deputy Minister Hussain Bhaila, MP's Faizer Mustapha, Faizal Cassim, Basheer Segu Davood, Kabeer Hashim, Presidential Adviser A. H. M. Azwer amongst others spoke on the steps need to be taken for the participation of Muslims as a separate independent entity, arriving at a common stand on issues that are of concern to the Muslim community and the composition of a common delegation to represent the Muslims.

"The participants at the end of the roundtable discussion resolved as thus: –

'Muslim Civil Society and its Political Leadership having met at a Roundtable discussion held at the Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo on 07th March 2006, at the invitation of the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka unanimously resolved to re-iterate the interests, fears, concerns and aspirations of the Muslims of Sri Lanka particularly the Muslims of North and East, that could only be represented by a separate independent Muslim delegation consensually nominated by the Muslims themselves and thus call upon the Government of Sri Lanka, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Co-chairs to the Peace Talks to take steps that would ensure effective participation of the independent Muslim delegation, in all future talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.'"

Geneva peace talks in grave danger – Balasingham

Mar 13 - "The Geneva peace talks will face grave danger if the Sri Lanka government refuses to disarm Tamil paramilitary organisations and continues allowing them to launch offensive military operations against our military positions in Batticaloa district," warned Mr Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator and political strategist of theLTTE, Tamilnet reported on Monday 13 March.

Commenting on the current situation Mr Balasingham is reported to have said that the LTTE leadership would be compelled to review its decision to participate in the next round of talks, to be held in Geneva on 19 April, if Colombo failed to fulfil the pledges agreed in the joint statement issued after the first session of talks in Geneva.

The LTTE's political ideologue had accused the Sri Lankan Government's security forces of actively participating with armed Tamil paramilitaries in the recent attacks on LTTE's sentry posts in Vavunativu and Vaharai in the Batticoloa district.

"These offensive military operations have taken place after the Geneva peace talks, where the government had pledged to uphold the obligations of the Ceasefire Agreement in disarming the Tamil paramilitaries and putting an end to their violent activities. The involvement of the armed forces in the operations of Tamil paramilitaries constitutes a serious breach of the spirit of the Geneva talks, and also must be considered as an act of bad faith on the part of the government", Mr Balasingham said.

"The LTTE leadership is watching the current developments after the Geneva talks with serious concern and dismay. So far the government has failed to take any action to contain the violence of the Tamil paramilitaries operating in the Tamil areas, particularly in the eastern province. The Rajapakse administration is turning a blind eye when Tamil paramilitaries – the Karuna group – launch attacks on our sentry posts with the active involvement of the Sri Lankan armed forces. The LTTE leadership is also losing faith in the current peace efforts when Sri Lankan political leaders and senior personnel of the security establishment issue contradictory and hostile statements against the letter and spirit of the Geneva talks," Mr Balasingham added.

Responding to a query on IGP Chandra Fernando's statement to the 'Daily Mirror', Mr Balasingham denied, categorically, that he had during the talks in Genva characterised the

Tamil Tigers as a "terrorist out-fit" as claimed by the Police chief., Mr Mr Balasingham is reported to have said, "At the Geneva talks I explained the historical evolution of the LTTE from an underground guerrilla organisation to a national liberation movement. In my exposition of the armed revolutionary struggle of the LTTE for self-determination, I admitted the fact that in the early stages of the armed resistance movement of the Tamils, the state's security forces, Tamil intelligence officers, and agents of the state were killed in the civil war. The IGP, with his extremely limited understanding of the history of the Tamil liberation struggle, has misconceived the Tamil armed resistance movement as a phenomenon of terrorism."

EU urges International body for future elections in NE

March 10 – The European Union Eleaction Observer Mission has called for an international body to administer future elections in the areas of the NorthEast Sri Lanka.

"It is now clear that if future elections in LTTE controlled areas are to be held in accordance with internationally recognised principles for genuine democratic elections, they will have to be administered and supervised by an international body as has happened in other countries that are in transition because of conflict," Chief Observer of EU Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) to Sri Lanka, John Cushnahan, said commenting on the report of the EU-EOM for the 2005 Sri Lankan Presidential elections held last November.

Commenting on the report EU Chief Observer Mr. John Cushnahan, in a press release dated 10 March, said:

"Compared to previous elections which I observed, the 2005 Presidential election was conducted in a much improved election environment in the South of the country. However, a very different scenario was to be found in the North and East. In the areas which the LTTE either controlled or exercised influence, there was little tangible evidence to show that an election process had actually taken place. Political campaigning was non existent and voters were prevented from exercising their franchise because of an enforced boycott by the LTTE and its proxies. Regrettably this was a repeat of what had happened during previous elections in these same areas and can no longer be ignored.

The recommendations of earlier EU-EOM's are re-stated because most of them have not yet been implemented. They remain essential ingredients for strengthening the electoral process. However, on their own, they are insufficient to address the fundamental malaise that exists in those areas of the North and East where voters and parties have consistently been denied the opportunity to fully participate in the democratic process. It is clear that more radical measures are necessary to transform this situation. It is now clear that if future elections in LTTE controlled areas are to be held in accordance with internationally recognised principles for genuine democratic elections, they will have to be administered and supervised by an international body as has happened in other countries that are in transition because of conflict. This approach was used recently in Afghanistan and prior to that in Cambodia (1993), South Africa (1994), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2001), Eastern Slavonia (1997) Liberia (1997), East Timor (2000-02) and Kosovo (2001-03). Lessons can be learnt from these experiences, adapted and applied to the North-eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Obviously such a body could only be invited into Sri Lanka if both parties to the peace process were in agreement. In this regard it is important to point out that both the GOSL and the LTTE have obligations to respect human rights if they are to receive funding under the Tokyo Donor Conference Declaration (2003).

It is important to remind everyone that successive EU EOM's have consistently defended the rights of all voters and all parties and criticized those responsible for preventing them from exercising their franchise, no matter who they were.

Once again we repeat our call that Amendment 17 which provides for the establishment of a number of independent commissions including an independent Election Commission should be fully implemented. This should happen without any further procrastination. Further improvements to the Legal Framework are also necessary in the areas of complaints and appeals procedures, the use of a national identity document for voting provided everybody is issued with one, the rights of migrant workers, transparency regarding campaign expenditure and the introduction of limits, the rights of 18 year old first time voters and the right of domestic observers to be present in counting centres as well as polling stations. Additionally the law in relation to annulling election results lacks clarity and needs to be overhauled. The Supreme Court Interim order of 9th November introduces "de facto" discriminatory measures against voters in LTTE controlled areas and should be brought into line with international standards for universal and equal suffrage.

The overall performance of the Election Administration was highly professional and impartial. The Commissioner of Elections enjoyed both the confidence of political parties in the country and is also held in high regard by both foreign and domestic election observers alike. We make a number of recommendations regarding technical improvements that could be introduced to assist their task.

It is important to point out that the voter registration process contains fundamental deficiencies which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. There are major problems in the North and East and serious inaccuracies also arose during this election with regard to the register in Colombo. The EU EOM recommends that the voter register is fully computerised, centralised and systematically updated including LTTE controlled areas.

Throughout the campaign period, the state controlled print and electronic media showed substantial bias in favour of the Prime Minister. Conversely the private media demonstrated partiality towards the UNP candidate. While this situation might have provided a measure of equilibrium, it cannot be ignored that state media have particular obligations to act impartially and if they do not then earlier action should be taken by the Election Administration to establish a Competent Authority to oversee the state media. In the view of the EU EOM an Independent Authority should be set up with a clear mandate to establish clear guidelines for all media, state and private, which would apply at all times and not simply during an election campaign. These guidelines while guaranteeing fairness should not interfere with editorial independence.

The two main domestic organizations, the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) and People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) played an important role in observing this election. The EU EOM strongly recommends that their right to be able to observe polling and counting procedures should be enshrined in law. The EU EOM appreciates the co-operation and assistance it received from these and other civil society organizations".

Media spectacle by Navy on escaped 'child soldiers'

Mar 9 - Many child rights activists and local child protection organisations have reacted with severe criticism to the manner in which the Sri Lankan Navy exposed to certain dan-

ger by presenting before a media briefing two young boys who are reported to have been forcibly recruited by the LTTE for military training.

UNICEF has raised concern over the matter saying the exercise has placed these children at great risk. "It is extremely regrettable that the identities of two children were revealed and widely reported by media as being former child combatants," UNICEF said adding, "Revealing children's names in these circumstances potentially places them at serious risk and hinders their return to normal life," UNICEF added. UNICEF urged the government, the media institutions and the public to support ethical reporting in the best interests of the children. The organisation also urged all involved to respect ethical guidelines on the reporting of children's issues and added that it would be following this up with the government and media.

Two young boys who made a daring escape from an LTTE training camp revealed a tale of continuing child abductions carried out by the LTTE despite its persistent denials. At a rare face-to-face meeting with the media in Colombo on 8 March evening the two teenagers aged 15 and 17 - unaware of the threat they face by going public - recalled how they were forcibly taken away by a group of armed LTTE cadres in Trincomalee and held captive for nearly one week before they hatched up a plan and made their getaway on Tuesday (7).

Surrounded by Navy personnel outside the Colombo Navy headquarters the two teenagers, who were visibly exhausted revealed there were more than 100 youth including those as young as 12 and 13 receiving weapons training at a camp identified as 'Three Two Base' which housed one of the main Tiger training facilities in Trincomalee.

Proving the intensity of the arms training they received, the 17-year-old Sivanathasundaram Chandrakumar at the media briefing dismantled and reassembled a T-56 weapon within minutes. Chandrakumar, a resident of Ichchanpattu was taken captive while at the Amman Kovil on March 1 by armed cadres who came on a motorbike.

K. Vinoharan, 15, said he was grabbed from the clutches of his pleading brother while returning home from school on March 1 by five LTTE cadres travelling in a van. "They grabbed me and hit me when I screamed. They put me in the van and drove away as my brother kept pleading with them to let me go," he said.

The youths said at the Trincomalee camp they were given poles to be used as makeshift T-56 weapons and went through strenuous training in weapons combat and were told by their 'leaders' to prepare to sacrifice their lives when duty calls. "We were shown the sea and told if war breaks out we will have to attack the navy and if required jump on the navy boats and explode bombs that will be strapped around us," the two boys said in unison.

The youths also said that during training they were both verbally and physically assaulted by the LTTE if they made any mistake adding that during the day it was weapons training while at night they were taken deep into the jungles for physical training. Young Vinoharan said video footage of attacks launched by the LTTE against government forces was also shown to the young trainees at night.

After six days in captivity Chandrakumar and Vinoharan hatched an escape plan and ran away from the LTTE and returned to their loved ones. The plan was a success as the two boys managed to make their getaway at night along the lonely sea shore adjoining the training camp. Chandrakumar and Vinoharan sought refuge at the nearest Navy detachment in Muttur on Tuesday March 7 where they were given shelter and food while the Navy informed the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission.

The Navy said it was making arrangements to return the two boys to their families after completing normal procedures.

'Sea Tigers threat to India's security'

Feb 24 – India's Home Affairs Ministry has identified the LTTE sea wing as a direct threat to Indian security. This view was enunciated in the Ministry's recent Annual Report, which contained India's first ever risk assessment of the LTTE. "This was the first time that an Annual Security Report has made such a direct statement," Defence analyst General Ashok Metta said in a symposium on 'Peace Negotiations in Sri Lanka'.

Commenting on the recent remarks by Nicholas Burns, visiting Under Secretary of United States on the LTTE, Metta said that his country fully shared his views. "We may not be able to make a similar statement due to internal factors. What we fail to say and do would be said and done by our strategic partner," he said referring to USA.

Gen. Metta who is also the Convener of the India-Sri Lanka Track II Dialogue forum asserted India's commitment to the unity, territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan State, while urging Sri Lanka to find a peaceful settlement that satisfies the aspirations of all communities that consider Sri Lanka as its home country.

"Make absolutely no mistake. India is committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka," he said. However, he said the proposed Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that hit headlines in the local media would not materialise, at least not as a written agreement. But he asserted "the content of the agreement would be implemented, Defence Pact or not."

"Many in Sri Lanka are over-estimating our capacities. There is much we can do and there are certain things we cannot do," he said. He said there are internal political dimensions that shape any country's Foreign Policy and National Policy. "No Government would make Foreign Policy decisions that would risk its political survival at home," he said, clearly referring to the DCA and the pressure on the Central Government by Regional Tamil political parties.

"We will not be part of the co-chairs and we would not step in to the boots of the facilitator, but we would give our full backing and support to the process," he stressed. "What we can not give on one front would be compensated on another front," he said and added that India was ready to enter into partnership in developing the war affected economy in the country. "We have pledged our support on the economic front. We have agreed to work in cooperation with the government in the North-East including areas under the LTTE control," he added.

EPRLF rejects 'paramilitary' tag

Mar 8 - "We, of the Eelam Peoples Liberation Front (EPRLF) wish to express our vehement objection to the reference made to the EPRLF by Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in his opening address at the peace Talks in Geneva on 22 February 2006, labelling us as a 'paramilitary group'," T.Sritharan, General Secretary, EPRLF (P) - Pathmanabah Group, said.

"We further note with deep revulsion a document published by the Sunday Leader, a newspaper in Sri Lanka, purported to have been submitted by the LTTE, in which two of the leaders of the EPRLF are shown as 'paramilitaries'," Sritharan added.

He alleged that the false and despicable method adopted by

the LTTE was a blatant attempt by it to tarnish all the Tamil parties that are not supportive of its nefarious and undemocratic activities to establish hegemony.

Sritharan in his statement clarified that The EPRLF is a political party that has been functioning among the Tamil people for over twenty five years and is engaged in the struggle for the attainment of a just and lasting solution to realise the political aspirations of the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka within the frame work of a united Sri Lanka. He added that following the Indo- Sri Lanka accord and accepting it as a viable interim political solution, we voluntarily disarmed ourselves and continued our political work among the people.

He said that they were "banned" by the LTTE in 1986 and were threatened not to engage in political work in the North–East. "The history of the LTTE is that it had been always bent on annihilating by violent means any individual or political party that is opposed to its fascist designs on the people of the North- East of Sri Lanka masquerading as liberators."

"Despite the unleashing of terror, intimidation and killings of our political leaders, members and activists, EPRLF has been actively engaged in political work for more than twenty five years," he said.

He further said that EPRLF was elected as the majority party in the North – East Provincial Government. "It had elected members in the Sri Lankan Parliament and two of whom were assassinated by the LTTE. Its members have been elected to Local government bodies as well. We have contested every general election since 1994. Even now, we have the support of a substantial number of the peace loving people of the North-east which we can establish if a free and fair election that is devoid of any violence or intimidation by the LTTE is held under international supervision in the Tamil speaking areas," Sritharan said.

He underlined that effectively, what the LTTE wants is for the EPRLF not to engage in any political work and its attempt to brand us as a 'paramilitary group' is its design to get an open license to continue their spree of killing of all political opponents. "They are seeking the assistance of the Sri Lankan government and the international community to act as their enforcing agency to implement their ban."

"The silence of the Sri Lankan delegation and the Norwegian facilitators in not exposing the diabolical designs of the LTTE is an affront to the democratic values and the human rights."

He pointed out that it was indeed a paradox that the LTTE, which is a banned organisation in several countries including UK, USA, India, Australia and Malaysia and which has two of its leaders, Pirabaharan and Pottu Amman wanted by the Interpol in connection with numerous murders, drug trafficking and other serious crimes; was allowed to make such a demand.

Sritharan said, "It is Mr. Anton Balasingham, who should be charged for glorifying suicide bombers and issuing death threats from London. It is shocking to know that he has the audacity to demand the dismantling of all the democratic political parties and the international community including the Norwegian facilitators are silent on it."

Sritharan in his statement appealed, "In the name of democratic values, human rights and permanent peace in Sri Lanka, we fervently request the Sri Lankan Government, the Norwegian facilitators and the co-chairs of the peace process to urgently put a stop to the continuing oppression of the alternative Tamil opinion and the appeasement of the LTTE. We appeal to them to prevent the devious designs of the LTTE to annihilate the Tamil political leaders."

Mahatma Gandhi scholarship scheme launched

The High Commission of India has announced the launch of the Mahatma Gandhi scholarship scheme for Sri Lankan students studying at the 'A' Level. One hundred scholarships will be granted every year proportionately among meritorious students from Southern, Western, Central, Eastern and Northern regions of Sri Lanka, a High Commission press release said.

It added: "The scholarship will consist of a grant of SLR 1,500/- per month. In order to compete, a student should be between 15 and 20 years of age; should have minimum aggregate marks of 70% at the 'O' Level exams; his/her parental income should be below SLR 240,000/- per annum and he/she should have confirmed admission to Class XI."

"The High Commission of India and the Ministry of Education, , Government of Sri Lanka, will select the students for grant of scholarships.

"Applications will be sought through advertisements in Sri Lankan newspapers every August. A total of 300 students will be short-listed on the basis of merit and called for interviews. Short-listed candidates will be paid conveyance charges for appearing at the interview subject to production of journey ticket upto a maximum amount of SLR 500/-. The suitability of the candidate and his financial status/background will be verified during the interview."

"The scholarships will be disbursed in two annual instalments. The first instalment will be paid on selection and the second will be disbursed after the scholar produces proof of his/her having got 50% marks in Class XI exams."

"According to the High Commissioner for India in Sri Lanka, Mrs. Nirupama Rao, the Mahatma Gandhi Scholarship Scheme is intended to assist talented young Sri Lankans from all regions of Sri Lanka in the pursuit of their educational goals. Through the years, the Government of India has actively participated in the extension of scholarships to Sri Lankan students for study of various disciplines in Indian universities. The Ceylon Estate Workers Education Trust or CEWET, with which the High Commission is closely associated, has also assisted needy students in the plantation sector of Sri Lanka. The new Mahatma Gandhi Scholarship Scheme will further cement friendship and understanding between India and Sri Lanka."

Muslims reject 'Jihad Group' charge

Mar 8 - Sri Lanka's chief Muslim party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), has accused the LTTE of carrying out a 'sinister operation' to link Sri Lankan Muslims with extremist Muslim groups such as Al Qaeda and vehemently denied accusations by the Tamil Tigers that a Muslim Jihadi group was operating in the east of the country.

Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), described as 'preposterous', the claims made by the LTTE who maintain that several killings of Muslims as well as Tamils were carried out by an emerging 'Jihad' movement.

The LTTE on Monday (6) stated that the latest killing in the east of a Muslim businessman was carried out by a Jihadi group while the LTTE peace delegation who met government representatives for peace talks in Geneva last month demanded that the government disarm an alleged 'Jihadi' Muslim militant

outfit which they said was operating in the east of the country.

"This is absolute nonsense. We will be the first to know if there is a Muslim militant group operating in the east. Sixty seven Muslims have been killed by the LTTE in the past few months. Are the Tigers now trying to say that Muslims are killing Muslims," an irate SLMC leader said, claiming that the LTTE accusation was a deliberate and covert plan to tarnish the image of moderate Sri Lankan Muslims and divert international attention away from the killings and terror carried out by the LTTE terrorists.

"We are not surprised if very soon they (the Tamil Tigers) proclaim to the international community that Sri Lankan Muslim groups have links with the Al Qaeda. We have raised concerns about this with President Mahinda Rajapakse," the SLMC leader said, following a private meeting with President Rajapakse on Monday (6).

Meanwhile, following speculation that the SLMC which has a history of being linked with the present main opposition, the United National Party (UNP), might join the Rajapakse government, Hakeem said the party would do 'what is best' for the peace process."We discussed at length with the President the peace process and its implications on the Muslims, especially the Muslims who live in the east who are the majority community in several eastern districts," he said stating that the SLMC will continue lobbying for a separate Muslim delegation at the next round of peace talks scheduled in April this year. Asked if there was an outright invitation by Rajapakse for the SLMC to join his government, the Muslim Congress leader said that the President had expressed his opinion that such a move would strengthen the government in its peace efforts with the LTTE. "The President feels that his hands would be strengthened if the SLMC would lend its full support to the government. We need to take a pragmatic step – but we do not at the moment say we will be joining the government," Hakeem said. He did not deny that such a move was possible in the near future. [DAWN]

PLOTE protests against 'paramilitary' label

Mar 13 - Protesting against the inclusion of his party in the category of 'paramilitary groups' by Mr Anton Balasingham during last month's Geneva talks between the government and the LTTE, PLOTE leader Dharmalingam Sitharthan says in a statement that, "A duty is cast on me, as the president of PLOTE, to alleviate any misconceptions created by the propaganda of LTTE to undermine the reputation of our organization, among the international community and to understand our political goals."

"It has become a habit for LTTE to portray and maliciously blame all other Tamil parties time and again as traitors, fifth columns or collaborators whenever there is a failure or military defeats on their part or any other organization which refuses to play second fiddle to them."

Mr Sitharthan says, "In the CFA (Cease-fire Agreement) document of Feb. 2002, the term 'paramilitary' was tossed in by the Norwegians and LTTE, and endorsed by the then Sri Lankan government. The term 'paramilitary' used in the CFA has been misunderstood and often misinterpreted. Since CFA, pro-LTTE media use this term with malice and forethought to justify the killings by the LTTE.

"After 30 years of war the LTTE has not won anything in terms of self rule or the separate state it has promised or had done nothing to reduce the hardships or enhance the basic amenities to alleviate the suffering of the people. It is only obsessed with pursuing the agenda of factional supremacy.

"LTTE has once again demonstrated, in Geneva, that it will continue to undermine the democratic rights of Tamil people by trading it for its own survival and imposition of its fascist rule over the Tamil people, with the connivance of Sri Lankan government and Norway.

Asserting that PLOTE is a registered and recognized political party, Mr Sitharthan says, "Since the recognition of our party, we have our political offices in all the districts of North East and an office in Colombo. These offices have been functioning for more than fifteen years, with the exception of Jaffna office which was opened in 1996.

"In 1994 March Local Council elections, we won the Vayuniya Urban Council and several Pradeshiya Sabhas in the Eastern Province. In 1994 August General Election three MP were elected from the Vanni district. In 1997 Jaffna district Local Council election, we obtained 28% of the total votes polled in Jaffna district and won two Urban Councils, two Pradeshiya sabhas and we were the opposition in Jaffna Municipal Council."

The PLOTE leader further states, "In Geneva, LTTE had claimed that they had found out some top secrets about our dealings with Sri Lankan Forces and incriminate us as a paramilitary group and gave names of our party district organizers as paramilitary group leaders. There is nothing secret about our political offices or the organizers. A large number of members of the public visit these offices regularly and discuss their problems with our organizers. And, several foreign diplomats and foreign dignitaries have visited these offices and discuss current political situation and needs of the districts with our district leaders.

"After signing the CFA between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE, we have handed over the weapons given to us for self-protection, on the guarantee of safety of our cadres by the Sri Lankan government and the Norwegians. Unfortunately they have let us down badly. Our cadres are unarmed and helpless in the face of armed attacks by the LTTE. Several of our unarmed political workers have been killed/abducted by the LTTE during the period of ceasefire. We have complained each and every violation by LTTE to the Security Forces, the Police and Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). Unfortunately they have shown little or no interest. I have personally complained to Mr. Eric Solhiem about the abduction of our four members including Mr. Sinnathamby Ganeshalingam and requested him to secure their release form LTTE.

"The government has assigned police/military personnel to our offices for this protection. It's obvious when Sri Lankan Security Forces give protection, the military officers have to have continuous dialog with our organizers or members to ensure the security of our offices. Some of the names of the military officers mentioned in the LTTE's document, we have never heard of.

"The claim of LTTE that we are a paramilitary group is malicious, unfounded and with the intention of getting tacit approval of the international community to continue their killing spree.

"The Geneva talks very clearly show that both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are not interested in finding a lasting solution for the Tamil problem. It seems both of them are interested only in dragging the talks until they are satisfied that they have achieved the military superiority. We earnestly request you to use your good offices to put adequate pressure on both Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to start talking on the core issues with the aim of finding a permanent solution."

Rs. 230m for Jaffna College of Technology

Feb 2 - A sun of Rs. 230 million will be spent to accelerate the work on the construction of the proposed College of Technology in Jaffna. Of this sum, Rs. 900 million is earmarked to spend on building construction. The balance amount utilised to obtain modern equipment for this college and for training managers of Technical Education and teachers in Korea.

An agreement was signed recently between the Governments of Korea and Sri Lanka. This Technical College comes under the Department of Technical Education under the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training.

A special discussion was held between the Minister of Vocational Training and Technical Training, Piyasena Gamage and the Korean Ambassador, Lim J. Hong to accelerate the work in an efficient and fruitful manner. Director General of the Department of Technical Education and Training. Dr. Obeysekera, Director, Infrastructure of the Ministry, U. W. Rodrige and advisor to the Minister, C. W. Karunaratne also participated.

It was decided to complete the work within two months. Those entering the Technical College will undergo courses in electrical engineering, technical engineering, Computer science, repairing vehicles. The Jaffna Technical College is now elevated to the status of a College of technology.

'We are not a paramilitary group' says EPDP

The local media, particularly the Tamil media, in the last few days have given publicity to the LTTE allegation at the Geneva talks about the paramilitary groups working with the Sri Lankan Security Forces (SLSF) and inter-alia referring to the EPDP also as one amongst them. While the EPDP categorically denies all such allegations, it was duty bound to expose the tactics of the LTTE in casting aspersions and such unfounded allegations, the EPDP said in statement issued in Colombo.

In its statement, the EPDP says that the LTTE has sacrificed the lives of thousands of Tamil youth. Making the pledge to liberate their homeland, the expatriate Tamil community had been forced to part with their hard earned dollars, pounds and euros. But the LTTE has failed to deliver the promised Tamil Eelam to the Tamil people after subjecting the Tamil people to three decades of war in the course of which they have achieved nothing but misery for the Tamil people. So they are engaged in diverting the attention of the discontented Tamil people by casting aspersions against other parties for their own failure.

The EPDP further says that the mounting pressure on the LTTE by the International Community over child conscription, political killings and other atrocities against the innocent public has further compounded the dire need for such diversionary tactics by the LTTE.

If the LTTE is really interested in solving the problem of the Tamil people, there are a number of issues - ranging from day to day hardship faced by the Tamil people to the political solution to the ethnic problem - they should have taken up for discussion.

A close watch on LTTE chronology of peace negotiations would undoubtedly reveal that they had always taken up issues concerning their military position rather than issues related to the aspirations of the Tamil people.

Even the proposal for Interim Administration put forward by them in October 2003, is a document seeking hegemony over the administration of the North-East region and de-facto recognition of the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamils. IT was a document seeking recognition and legitimacy for a fascist rule in the North-East Region.

Since signing of the MoU, we the EPDP have time and again brought to the notice of the SLMM, the Norwegian Embassy and other International Community of the atrocities committed by the LTTE against our members. Many of our important leaders, including democratically elected Chairman and members of local bodies, have been killed cold bloodedly, many have been abducted and presumed killed, hundreds of incidents of attack on our members and offices had taken place. If our members are paramilitary forces, as alleged by the LTTE, they would have defended themselves from such attacks than succumbing to it.

The Ceasefire Agreement and the subsequent obligation by the political parties such as the EPDP, EPRLF and PLOTE to hand over all weapons issued to them by successive Governments for their self-protection from the LTTE, had made it easy for the LTTE to achieve their aim of sole representation by physical annihilation of members and supporters of other political parties. The LTTE hoped that the withdrawal of weapons would compel these parties to move out of the North-East Province, and create the conditions for them to be the fascist sole representatives of the Tamils. When that did not happen, they started attacking our members and offices.

It is in this context, we would like to review the allegation levelled by the LTTE. In an attempt to justify its allegation, the LTTE has given a list of names as EPDP paramilitary cadres and their 'handlers' in the SLSF. All the names referred to in the list (except one) are area/district leaders of EPDP. The EPDP has political offices in all state controlled districts of North-East Province, Puttalam and Colombo.

EPDP has 15 offices in Jaffna, one office in Mannar, two offices in Vavuniya, one office in Trincomalee, three offices in Batticaloa and one office in Ampara. It is through these offices, the EPDP carries out its democratic political activities.

Not only members of the public visit these offices daily, even foreign dignitaries, INGO representatives and journalists visit these offices and meet those people referred to for various discussions and interviews. Some of them were candidates in the Parliamentary and local body elections.

Security to these offices is provided by Police and there is a need for the Army in charge of the respective areas (Navy in case of Islands off Jaffna) to liaise with the Police on security related matters. This cannot be construed to mean that the EPDP is working with Security Forces as paramilitaries.

Most killings of our members had taken place while they were at home with their families or on their way to their home. Now most of them have moved into our offices, which are protected by the Police with the help of the Security Forces. The LTTE is making this allegation to distance the Security Forces from the security network provided to our offices, so that they could easily attack our offices and finish us off.

Thus, the LTTE's allegation concerning 'paramilitary groups' is only a tactical move to eliminate all non-LTTE parties. On the one hand the LTTE is trying to divert the attention of the Tamil people, the Tamil expatriate community and the International Community from their main concerns, and on the other hand it is trying to weaken the security network provided to the EPDP offices to complete their mission of eliminating all our members. The LTTE ultimately wants to divert the attention of the International Community from the atrocities and killing committed by them and also it is a pre-emptive move to justify their future killings as well, making it easy for

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them to achieve their goal of eliminating the EPDP.

In conclusion, we wish to again reiterate our position that none of our members are involved with any paramilitary activities and the LTTE accusation that the EPDP is a paramilitary military group is only a hoax to tarnish the image of the EPDP, which is committed to democracy, pluralism and human rights and a party that is struggling hard to re-establish democratic traditions in the North-East. It is in this process that our party had a number of members elected to Parliament and controlled many local bodies in the North-East province through elected representatives. The EPDP leader has been elected as a Member of Parliament for the Jaffna Electoral district continuously since 1994 to date, the EPDP statement said.

Danish Tamil expelled from party

Mar 16 - A Sri Lankan Tamil in Denmark has been expelled from the Danish Social Democratic Party (DSDP) of which he was a member following the disclosure of his links with the LTTE and its activities. Arul Thilainadarasa, a DSDP member of the Herning City Council was expelled by the party on Tuesday (14) after he reportedly admitted his affiliations with the LTTE. The party took this decision following a meeting where Thilainadarasa submitted his explanation on accusations linking him to the LTTE forced-fund raising activitites in Denmark, a story given wide coverage in Danish media.

The widely read MetroXpress headlined the story "Pressure on Tigers Growing". Politiken, another prominent newspaper, picked up the expulsion story and posted it on their website.

The DSDP's investigations had revealed that Mr Thillainadarasa was a former Chairman of the LTTE's front organisation identified as the "Tamil Coordination Committee in Denmark". It runs 28 "Mother Tongue" schools throughout the country and they receive state funding from the city councils.

MetroXpress said the exposure came after some Danish Tamils resisted the extortion attempts and reported the matter to the authorities. The paper quoted one of the oppressed Tamil youth, a software architect who decided to go public, along with his brother, despite threats by the undercover groups. Robin Nichilapillai, a former leader in charge of fund raising was qouted in the news as saying that he was responsible in collecting around 5,000 to 10,000 danish kroners (Rs. 160,000) from the Tamils a day and delivering it to their headquarters in Herning.

The paper also quoted the Social Democratic Party Secretary as saying it was against their political principles to have their members associate with groups involved in armed conflict. The Chairman of the Justice committee in Parliament Peter Skaarup reportedly stated that the Association should be banned from any operations in the country. The Danish Justice Minister expressing deep concern over the incident

The Danish Justice Minister Lene Espersen appearing on DR TV's midday news said her government was deeply concerned over the issue and requested those harassed to go to Police and assist them stop the extortion. She said Denmark was a democratic country with laws to protect people from oppression. She requested those who had been affected to go to the police as they should not allow this practice to continue.❑

GENEVA TALKS:

Opening Statement by the LTTE

The Opening Address by Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, (LTTE) at the Peace Talks in Geneva on 22 February 2006.

The most constructive achievement of the Norwegian facilitated peace process has been the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), exactly four years ago today, on the 22 February 2002. The event brought an end to the bloody ethnic war that lasted more than two decades, causing massive scale death and destruction. Though the truce agreement has been subjected to enormous strains, particularly during the latter part of 2005, it still holds, having prevented the parties in conflict from embarking on major armed confrontations. I should say that it is the truce agreement that has helped to avert the out-beak of an all-out war and created the present environment where both the parties could engage in a dialogue to enhance the conditions of peace and normalcy in the war affected northeast.

The Ceasefire Agreement was not formulated in haste to the advantage of one party, as some critics have argued, but rather, given careful and meticulous scrutiny to all aspects - terms, conditions and obligations – of the truce by both parties, with the skilled assistance of the Norwegian facilitators. The Ceasefire Agreement is a well crafted, valid instrument of peace, devised for the purpose of brining an end to hostilities and to create a positive environment conducive for meaningful negotiations. Therefore, the Ceasefire Agreement should be viewed as an effective mechanism that can facilitate and promote the peace process.

We are of the opinion that the Ceasefire Agreement is the foundation upon which the peace process has to be built. It is true that in recent times the truce accord has been severely undermined as a consequence of the rapid escalation of violence in the northeast, particularly during the latter part of last year and in January this year, when it turned into an ugly form of a shadow or subversive war. This violent phenomenon has been characterised by arbitrary killings, abductions and disappearances of Tamil civilians in the northeast. According to authentic records, 109 Tamil civilians have been arbitrarily killed by the Sri Lankan armed forces with the active assistance of the Tamil paramilitaries. Forty eight civilians have disappeared after being arrested or abducted by the Sri Lanka military. This horrendous violence was unleashed against Tamil civilians, particularly in Jaffna, with the sinister objective of terrorising the Tamil civilian population. This terrorisation of our people was intended as collective punishment against the whole Tamil population for the many soldiers killed in the subversive war.

Our delegation will submit, for your scrutiny, comprehensive reports providing detailed information about the nature of violence committed against Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan armed forces since the new government took office on 19 November 2005. We will also submit detailed reports about civilians killed and injured by the Sri Lankan armed forces and Tamil paramilitaries during the entire ceasefire period of the last four years.

Similarly, we suppose that your government is going to submit detailed reports of acts of ceasefire violations, allegedly committed by the Liberation Tigers.

Your government has already released statistics accusing the LTTE of committing 5464 violations of ceasefire during the last four years. We cannot accept such exaggerated figures as authentic acts of ceasefire violations. A huge majority of those figures are attributed to recruitment. These are cases of under aged youth said to be joining the LTTE. Your government, as well as the SLMM, have accused the LTTE of under aged recruitment, without taking

GOVT-LTTE JOINT STATEMENT

Full text of the statement released by Mr Erik Solheim, the Norwegian Minister of International Development at the end of the talks between the Government and the LTTE held on 22-23 February 2006, Geneva, Switzerland:

"The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) met in Geneva 22-23 February 2006 for talks on the Ceasefire Agreement.

The parties discussed issues related to the ceasefire, including the concerns of the Muslim, Sinhalese, and Tamil civilians.

The GOSL and the LTTE are committed to respecting and upholding the Ceasefire Agreement, and reconfirmed their commitment to fully cooperate with and respect the rulings of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

The GOSL and the LTTE are committed to taking all necessary measures to ensure that there will be no intimidation, acts of violence, abductions or killings.

The LTTE is committed to taking all necessary measures to ensure that there will be no acts of violence against the security forces and police. The GOSL is committed to taking all necessary measures in accordance with the Ceasefire Agreement to ensure that no armed group or person other than Government security forces will carry arms or conduct armed operations.

The GOSL and the LTTE discussed all issues concerning the welfare of children in the North East, including the recruitment of children.

The SLMM will report on implementation on the above agreements at the next session of talks."

The parties requested the Swiss Government to host the next round of talks in Geneva on 19-21 April 2006."

into consideration the complex child rights issues in the northeast and the number of children released by the LTTE under the Action Plan for the War affected Children undertaken in association with UNICEF. Mr Tamilselvan will give you a briefing later on the child rights situation in the northeast.

In this context I wish to point out that the government as well as the SLMM have conveniently ignored the vast number of ceasefire violations committed by the Tamil paramilitaries in the form of arbitrary killings of civilians, political assassinations, abductions, harassment, extortion, intimidation, assault, torture and forced conscription of children. Most of these crimes committed by paramilitaries are blamed on the LTTE. I am sorry to say that it is only recently that the SLMM has realised the negative consequences of the violence of the Tamil paramilitaries and expressed serious concern that such 'armed elements' are posing a serious threat to peace. Since the criminal violence of Tamil paramilitaries has become a critical issue in the implementation process of the truce agreement, the government should give serious thought to containing such forces in order to stabilise the conditions of peace.

The main topic for discussion at this negotiating table is the Ceasefire Agreement. As the parties in conflict who entered into this peace accord, we must endeavour to seek practical ways of implementing the Ceasefire Agreement effectively, so that the truce becomes constructive, productive and meaningful. We are of the view that the recent escalation of violence, that brought the parties to the brink of an all-out war, was primarily due to the non-implementation of the obligations of the truce.

The implementation of the confidence building measures, as enunciated in the articles of the Ceasefire Agreement, are extremely crucial to the process of the de-escalation and normalisation. The following are the key elements of the Ceasefire Agreement stipulated as confidence building measures that are vital to create conditions of normalcy in the northeast.

- Clause 1.2. Neither party shall engage in any offensive military operations.

- Clause 1.8. Tamil paramilitary groups shall be disarmed by the GOSL by D-day + 30 at the latest. The GOSL shall offer to integrate individuals in these units under the command and disciplinary structure of the GOSL armed forces for service away from the Northern and Eastern Province.

- Clause 1.13. As of D-day + 90, all unarmed LTTE members shall be permitted freedom of movement in the North and East.

- Clause 2.1. The Parties shall in accordance with international law abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population.

- Clause 2.2., 2.3., 2.4. stipulate places of worship, school premises and public buildings 'occupied by either party shall be vacated and returned to the intended use'.

- Clause 2.5. The Parties shall review the security measures and the set-up of checkpoints, particularly in densely populated cities and towns, in order to introduce systems that will prevent harassment of the civilian population.

- Clause 2.11. A gradual easing of fishing restrictions shall take place starting from D-day. As of D-day + 90, all restrictions on day and night fishing shall be removed subject to certain exceptions...

- Clause 2.12. The Parties agree that search operations and arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act shall not take place.

Ever since the truce agreement was signed the Government of Sri Lanka has failed to implement these key clauses. The LTTE has repeatedly appealed to the government to fulfil its obligations under the peace accord. We have also taken up the issue of the non-implementation of the terms and conditions of the Ceasefire Agreement during our peace talks with Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe's government. All our genuine efforts to ensure the full implementation of the key elements of the Agreement became futile.

The co-habitation conflict, or rather, the power struggle between the Wickremasinghe government and President Kumaratunga became a serious impediment to advance the peace process and to secure proper implementation of the ceasefire.

With the termination of the peace talks, the security situation in the north east began to deteriorate.

The violence of the Tamil paramilitaries intensified in the form of a dirty subversive war directed against our cadres and supporters, a shadow war in which the Sri Lanka armed forces actively colluded with the Tamil armed groups. We will submit for your examination a comprehensive report on Tamil paramilitary organisations operating in the northeast and in Colombo. The report provides ample evidence on the existence of the main paramilitary groups, their leadership, the command structure, the location of their camps and their close relationship with the Sri Lanka armed forces, particularly with the Sri Lanka military intelligence.

The existence of Tamil armed paramilitary groups is an indisputable fact. Since these Tamil armed organisations are sustained, supported and controlled by the Sri Lanka military, we categorise them as paramilitaries. They are not simply 'armed elements' functioning independently in a political vacuum, as some people assume. They are well organised militant forces, properly trained and armed in subversive warfare and function covertly in connivance with the Sri Lanka armed forces. Some of the armed organisations have a long history, extending to more than two decades. Originally they took arms for a political cause, but later, with the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, they abandoned their political ideals and became mercenary armed groups under the Indian Peace Keeping Forces to fight against the LTTE.

Following the withdrawal of the IPKF, these armed organisations changed their loyalty and allegiance to 'new masters', that is, the Sri Lanka state and its military and intelligence apparatus, in the war against the LTTE. Though these armed groups registered themselves as political parties and claimed to have entered the democratic political mainstream, they have not dismantled their military units nor have they abandoned armed violence. We have, in our report, listed several incidences of armed violence committed by these Tamil paramilitary groups in which several leaders and cadres of

our organisation, as well as prominent parliamentarians, journalists, educationists and civilian supporters, were executed in cold blood. We will provide maps in our report indicating the close proximity of paramilitary camps of the EPDP and other groups to Sri Lankan army camps and police stations.

You are well aware that Clause 1.8 of the Ceasefire Agreement specifically stipulates that the Tamil paramilitaries should be disarmed by the GOSL. Yet, the Sri Lanka government, to date, has failed to honour this crucial obligation, which is vital for strengthening the conditions of peace and normalcy. The SLMM has also warned that the peace environment is seriously threatened by the violence of these Tamil armed groups. The international community, represented by the Co-Chairs, have also made statements calling upon your government to disarm the paramilitaries and to put an end to their violent activities. In a recent statement President Rajapkse has pledged that he would rein in the Tamil armed organisations and would not allow them to function in the government controlled areas.

There are five major paramilitary groups operating in the northeast and in Colombo. They are known as Karuna group, EPDP group, PLOTE group, EPRLF (Varaithar) group and a Muslim Paramilitary group called Jihad group. In our report we have given detailed information about each group, the names of leaders and area operational commanders functioning in various districts and in the capital. We are certain that the Sri Lankan military hierarchy, particularly the Sri Lanka military intelligence, is well aware of the existence and activities of the Tamil armed paramilitaries. Nevertheless, we are also providing you with detailed factual information to reinforce our argument.

It is the considered view of our liberation organisation, as well as the general opinion of the Tamil people, that the armed violence of the Tamil paramilitaries is posing a grave threat to peace and stability in Tamil areas and endangering the Ceasefire Agreement. Therefore, we call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to disarm these Tamil paramilitary organisations, fulfilling a crucial obligation of the truce agreement.

One of the crucial confidence building measures laid down in the Ceasefire Agreement is that the parties, in accordance with international law, should abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population. Clauses 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 stipulate that the Sri Lankan armed forces, within a limited time frame, should vacate places of worship, schools and public buildings.

In defiance of these truce obligations and in grave violation of international humanitarian law, the government's security forces, for more than a decade, continue to occupy schools and public buildings and made places of worship inaccessible to the Tamil civilian population. Several places of worship made inaccessible are Hindu sacred shrines of historical and cultural importance, so dear to our people. In Jaffna alone 35 prominent schools were forced to close down and 201 Hindu and Christian places of worship have been made inaccessible to our people. This vicious type of military occupation has seriously offended the cultural and religious sensitivities of the Tamil people, an activity specifically forbidden by the Ceasefire Agreement.

The creation of High Security Zones (HSZ) by the Sri Lankan armed forces in the militarily occupied territories of the northeast, particularly in the densely populated Jaffna Peninsula, has caused immense suffering to the Tamil civilian population. To facilitate the occupation of a huge number of troops, amounting to fifty thousand, the so-called High Security Zones were established by forcefully evicting several thousands of Tamil families from their homes. The worst affected region is the Jaffna Peninsula where entire villages were evicted with the civilian population and thousands of houses forcefully usurped and our people denied access to farmlands, fishing coasts, schools and places of worship. This is a grave injustice committed against the Tamil people by the invasion forces, destroying their social and cultural life.

We will submit to you a document on, 'The Human Costs of the High Security Zones', which provides comprehensive information about the nature of Sinhala military occupation of the Tamil region and its implications on the life of our people. Our statistics on HSZ shows that 28,830 house owners in Jaffna have been forcefully evicted from their homes and nearly 13,000 acres of fertile farmlands made inaccessible to them. The creation of High Security Zones has reduced 20,000 families to conditions of destitution and they have been languishing in refugee camps and welfare centres for over a decade. The forceful usurpation of public property to the extent of 30 percent of the landmass of Jaffna under the claim of High Security Zones, and denying our people their right to return to their homes and property is a blatant violation of human rights. This forced eviction of people by the state under the pretext of national security is condemned by several UN Human Rights instruments as gross violations of human rights. These UN instruments characterise this practice of forced evictions by states as serious crimes inflicting grave and serious harm to the basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of large numbers of people, both individual and collective (The issue is best explained in the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights Fact Sheet 25 on 'Forced Evictions').

The displacement of several thousands of families and their pathetic plight in subnormal conditions in the refugee camps has become a formidable humanitarian tragedy. Yet the Sri Lankan state and the military hierarchy continue to deny, on security grounds, the basic rights of our people to return to their homes and property. We wish to point out that the Sri Lankan government should no longer ignore this grave humanitarian issue un-

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der the pretext of 'security'. The problem of the HSZ has to be resolved without further delay, facilitating the resettlement of the internally displaced persons. The resolution of this issue is extremely crucial for the restoration of peace and normalisation of civilian life in Tamil areas.

In this brief statement I have touched on a few of the crucial issues to be addressed for the effective implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement. The other most important issue to be addressed is the severe restrictions imposed on fishing and the enormous suffering of the people as a consequence. We have given comprehensive information in our documents in regards to the suffering of the Tamil fishing community. We will take up the issue on the restrictions on fishing during the course of our discussions.

The other important matter we wish to raise is the freedom of movement of our political cadres in the government controlled areas. You are aware that the LTTE leadership withdrew our political cadres from the government controlled Tamil areas as a consequence of the violent activities of the paramilitaries, who, on several occasions attacked our unarmed cadres and bombed our political offices. Our political cadres can only function in government controlled areas if the paramilitaries are disarmed and normalcy returns to Tamil areas.

In concluding I wish to say that we do agree that there have been serious breaches of the Ceasefire Agreement, for which the parties in conflict, as well as the Tamil paramilitaries, should bear culpability. Nevertheless, I wish to point out that it would serve no meaningful purpose if we enter into a recriminatory debate, making accusations and counter accusations against each other over the abuses of the truce. Instead of engaging in acrimonious bickering that might poison the atmosphere of goodwill, it would be prudent to engage in a constructive discussion, exploring ways and means to stabilise and strengthen the Ceasefire Agreement. You will certainly agree with me that consolidating the Ceasefire Agreement is the only practical way open to the parties in conflict to stabilise the conditions of peace and normalcy, which are essential and crucial to take the peace process forward. ❑

GENEVA TALKS:
Government's opening statement

Opening Statement by SL Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva Head of Delegation, Government of Sri Lanka at the opening session of the talks between Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, 22 February 2006, follows:

Hon. Minister Erik Solheim and the Facilitation team, Mr. Anton Balasingham and members of the LTTE delegation, Colleagues,

I. Introduction

On behalf of H.E. the President of the Republic of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Government of Sri Lanka, I am pleased to make these preliminary comments at the commencement of the talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government and hosted by the Government of Switzerland. At the outset, let me thank all the parties, including the Co-Chairs, who have worked tirelessly to make this event a reality.

At this stage, I would also like to express the hope of the Government and the People of Sri Lanka that these discussions will mark a significant chapter in the dialogue between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. It is also our wish that this dialogue would form the basis of a meaningful ceasefire where the beneficiaries of it would be all the People of Sri Lanka.

An analysis of successful negotiations worldwide would perhaps establish the fact that successes have resulted on occasions where parties to the conflict have had the courage, dedication and determination to pursue a solution through a continuous process of dialogue with sincerity. We should keep in mind that no issue is insurmountable, if the interests of the People and the Country are kept uppermost in our minds. Accordingly, it is our desire to express our views in a frank and forthright manner, rather than to make vague and ambiguous statements that would serve no useful purpose, although they may appear more acceptable on the surface.

As we all know, H.E. the President Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected on a platform of seeking an "honorable peace." On that basis, our delegation affirms and emphasizes the position of the Government of Sri Lanka that the Ceasefire Agreement entered intó between the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and Mr. V. Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE on the 22nd February 2002 is contrary to our Constitution and law. Furthermore, it is prejudicial to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that certain benefits flowed to the People from the observance of the ceasefire, which resulted in our strong determination and desire to preserve the ceasefire.

We also consider the ceasefire as a first step to arrive at a negotiated settlement to the ongoing conflict and we propose to rectify certain grave anomalies arising from the agreement.

Since assuming office, our President has at various times and occasions extended invitations to begin a dialogue with the LTTE. Furthermore, our Government has been keen that the overall process of discussion and dialogue should be of an inclusive nature since it affects the whole Nation. We take pride in the fact that the Government's participation at these talks in Geneva is with the support and goodwill of all the democratically elected political parties in Sri Lanka.

The discussions at the All Parties Conference held over the past few weeks resulted in the consensus that we initiate this dialogue with the LTTE. These discussions also served to prepare a common platform for the dialogue that we are commencing today with renewed hopes and expectations. This fact is significant since it is the first time in the history of this conflict that such a consensus has been reached. Therefore, I am privileged and honored to lead the Government's delegation that is in Geneva today with the strong support from the Peoples' representatives of Sri Lanka.

II. A Fresh Approach

H.E. President Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected to office on 17th November 2005 with a mandate from the Nation to work towards the achievement of an honourable peace. The Mahinda Chintana, which encapsulates the President's vision for the country, makes it clear that the President has recognized the need for a direct dialogue with the LTTE, in the pursuit of such a goal. He has even stated that he is prepared to meet with the Leader of the LTTE and other representa-

tives for such discussions. Notwithstanding the clear enunciation of such a position, it was unfortunate that upon assumption of office, H.E. the President was confronted with a number of acts which would easily qualify as being highly provocative. Such acts had the potential to disturb and deflect us from the path of dialogue and discussion. However, our President with his deep commitment to peace, reacted with patience and restraint to contain the tension that resulted from these acts of provocation and hostilities.

This enlightened response was certainly not a sign of weakness, but a display of our firm commitment to peace. We are therefore thankful to the international community for their steadfast encouragement for the commencement of these discussions. It is also our considered view that in the event such provocations had continued unabated, the repercussions may have been extremely dangerous with further loss of lives and the ceasefire becoming totally meaningless and leading to its eventual collapse.

Let me at this stage assure all, that it is the desire of H.E. President Rajapaksa to look at issues from a fresh perspective to find a sustainable solution to the conflict that engulfs our country. Let me also re-iterate that our Government is committed to talk, listen and think afresh.

III. Democracy and Human Rights

Sri Lanka is one of Asia's most long-standing democracies. The people have enjoyed uninterrupted universal franchise since 1931, long before gaining independence in 1948. For over 65 years, our people have elected their own representatives to Parliament, from all ethnic groups. Both within the confines of Parliament and beyond, the right to criticize both the Government and the Opposition is an integral part of the freedom of expression. We must therefore ensure that all citizens of our country, wherever they may live, are free to exercise their franchise at free and fair elections, whether they be Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Malay, Burgher or any other group however small in numbers. The democratic process must prevail. Accordingly, no community or any section of a community should be deprived and denied their right to vote freely and to exercise their right to elect the representatives of their choice to whom they would entrust leadership.

It was a sad day for democracy in our country when at the Presidential Elections of November 2005, the LTTE forced the people in certain districts to observe a boycott of elections through coercion and general intimidation. It was a gross violation of democratic rights. In addition, the widespread rigging and corrupt election practices in many parts of the North at the general elections in April 2004 which was confirmed by the international election monitors could also be cited as further evidence of the LTTE's disregard for democracy. It is in that context that the Government of Sri Lanka sincerely hopes that with a meaningful ceasefire, the people in the North could participate freely in the democratic process. We are confident that these sentiments will also be endorsed by the international community where such democratic norms prevail.

Mindful of the respective rights of the ethnic and religious groupings as enshrined in the Constitution, our Government is committed to maintaining the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and pluralist character of Sri Lanka. All persons irrespective of their race, religion, caste or gender are equal before our law. All our people whichever part of Sri Lanka they live in, are protected by these basic fundamental rights. These rights must not be truncated in any part of Sri Lanka, thereby depriving those persons of equality before the law. It is unfortunate that the LTTE has unlawfully deprived the Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese of these fundamental and human rights, recognized in our law and in international law, in particular in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu districts in the North of Sri Lanka.

As we all know, as a result of the ceasefire that has been in effect since February 2002, the LTTE has been able to engage itself in political activity. At that time, it was the intention that other political parties, too, should also be permitted to engage themselves in political activity in the North and East without hindrance. However, it is regrettable that this aim could not be achieved due to the LTTE's hostile acts, including the assassination and abduction of political activists, which has obstructed the legitimate political activity of others. It is our hope that we would be able to move towards the restoration of the democratic values which are so important in a civilized society.

IV. Ceasefire Violations

As set out in the preamble of the Agreement on a Ceasefire between the then Prime Minister Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE, entered into on 22nd February 2002, four years to the day today, the importance of bringing the end to hostilities and improving the living conditions of all persons affected by the conflict was recognized. An end to hostilities was also seen as a means of establishing a positive atmosphere in which further steps towards a lasting solution could be taken.

However, the available evidence suggests that the LTTE had taken undue and unfair advantage of the ceasefire to strengthen its military capability. Repeated calls by the Government of Sri Lanka, the SLMM, and the international community to the LTTE to desist from such behavior has unfortunately not been heeded. This has resulted in a large number of significant violations which has seriously undermined the spirit of the ceasefire and threatened its termination.

The number of ruled violations by the LTTE as determined by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) since the beginning of the ceasefire up to the end of last month is a massive 3519. In comparison, the SLMM has determined that the GOSL has violated the agreement on 163 occasions. This shows that 96% of all violations have been committed by the LTTE. The violent incidents committed by the LTTE include assassinations, child recruitment and kidnappings, abductions of adults, suicide missions, killings of military and civilian persons, harassment of students and political workers, and destruction of property. Such incidents have seriously undermined the sustainability of the ceasefire and disturbed the return to normalcy for civilians in Sri Lanka, particularly in the North and East.

At this moment, we also wish to pay tribute to one of the great statesmen of our times, the late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, President's Counsel, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka. Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar was internationally respected, widely acclaimed and highly honored. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he toiled hard pursuing a solution to our conflict. The fact that such a person was assassinated by the LTTE when the ceasefire was in force demonstrates the disregard with which the agreement had been treated and also highlights the significant deficiencies of the current ceasefire.

These circumstances underscore the inherent weaknesses in the existing ceasefire agreement as well as the lacuna in setting out norms for its effective implementation. These also show that the lack of sanctions being attached to violations when there are clear determinations made by the SLMM, is a very serious shortcoming that needs to be addressed in the interest of all concerned.

In expressing its views about the ceasefire, the Government of Sri Lanka must take into account the concerns of all of the people of Sri Lanka. The Government takes this obligation seriously and has engaged in consultations with representatives of all ethnic communities in preparing for these talks. In this context, we also wish to raise some of the concerns of the Muslim community

with regard to the ceasefire.

As we all know, almost the entire Muslim community in the North was forcibly expelled by the LTTE during the time of the conflict. Families were ordered to leave their homes with only the possessions they could carry in their hands, on a few hours notice. Lives were lost, homes abandoned, and businesses forced to shut down. It was the hope of the Muslim people that the ceasefire would create the conditions that would enable them to feel secure to return to their homes and re-establish their lives. Unfortunately, most of these internally displaced people still linger in refugee camps or have been resettled elsewhere. Muslim people also face serious challenges to their security in the East, where incidents of violence threaten the civilian population at regular intervals.

It is the belief of the Government of Sri Lanka that the dialogue about the ceasefire would take into account the urgent concerns of the Muslim community. Accordingly, these issues and interests must be adequately addressed for the ceasefire to be meaningful.

V. Children Affected by the Armed Conflict

The Government of Sri Lanka has always endeavored to respect the rights of children. We have demonstrated this commitment by becoming a party to the major international human rights conventions, including the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention casts upon the Government, the obligation to protect the rights of all Sri Lankan children including children affected by armed conflict.

Well before assuming office as President, H.E. President Mahinda Rajapaksa had earned himself an outstanding reputation as a champion of human rights and as an ardent advocate for safeguarding the rights of children. It was therefore not surprising that as soon as he was elected as President, he established a new ministry for children to provide for the legal and social conditions to protect all children and ensure their welfare. Naturally therefore, we are seriously concerned whenever the denial of these rights takes place within the territory of Sri Lanka as it is contrary to our law, international obligations and the basic fundamentals of a civilised society.

In the context of the Government of Sri Lanka's overall commitment toward children and the obligations it has undertaken under international law, we find the violations of the rights of children committed by the LTTE as being totally unacceptable and deeply distressing.

The use of children by the LTTE in combat has been extensively documented by the SLMM, UNICEF, and other international agencies. According to UNICEF documentation, 5368 children are known by UNICEF to have been recruited by the LTTE, a figure that UNICEF acknowledges is under-representative of the actual number. Since the beginning of the ceasefire through 30 January 2006, the SLMM has ruled 2,011 violations against the LTTE for incidents of child recruitment and abduction; this number represents 55% of the total violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. UNICEF has also reported that child recruitment and kidnapping is continuing unabated as per their latest report of January 2006. Notwithstanding the concerns of almost the entire world community, it is sad that the LTTE has continued to demonstrate their disregard for the rights of children. The recent incident where three Government police officers associated with the National Child Protection Agency were abducted by the LTTE while the officers were in pursuit of a known pedophile is a clear illustration of this unfortunate situation.

The importance and urgency of addressing the issue of child soldiers has been recognized by the United Nations Security Council, which in its recently passed Resolution 1612 urged strong action to be taken against parties that recruit and abduct underage children into their ranks. The LTTE has been identified as such a violating party in a Report submitted to the Security Council by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. However, despite repeated international condemnations of the incidents of recruitment and abduction of children, the violations continue to occur. It is the Government of Sri Lanka's fervent hope that a dialogue on this issue could contribute to creating a meaningful ceasefire, one in which all children of Sri Lanka are free to blossom and develop themselves into healthy and productive members of society.

VI. Law and Order

One of the cornerstones of a democracy is an environment of security. Without law and order and its enforcement, individuals are not free to exercise the full range of rights they are entitled to. Freedom of speech and the right to engage in political activities are meaningless if the exercise of these rights could lead to abduction or death. A state of ceasefire does not override the existing law and order mechanisms in society. For this reason, the Government of Sri Lanka deplores the large number of killings of Sri Lankans of various ethnic groups after the ceasefire of February 2002. These killings have seriously undermined the ceasefire. The Government expresses its grave displeasure and disappointment that deficiencies in the ceasefire agreement have been exploited in this manner, leading to serious strains being placed on the enforcement machinery of our system of law and order.

The Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa is committed to maintaining law and order without discrimination in every part of our country. His new administration initiated a program that extensively cracked down on organized criminals, underworld gangs, armed groups and narcotics dealers. This program is continuing with great intensity today. Criminals, whichever part of the country they operate in, are subject to this crack-down as the scope of this program covers the entire country. On that basis, the Government has already taken all necessary action to bring the perpetrators of certain recent crimes to justice in accordance with the due process of law. The murders of youth in Trincomalee, the reported abductions of members of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, TRO, the assassination of Parliamentarian Joseph Pararajasingham and all other reported incidents are being diligently investigated by our law enforcement authorities and we are taking all necessary action to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

It is also clear that certain parties with vested interests are attempting to accuse and discredit the Government of Sri Lanka for various alleged incidents. A critical examination of some of the recent allegations indicates that the media had been informed of some incidents well before such incidents have even been brought to the notice of the law enforcement authorities. In some cases, evidence has not been freely forthcoming and hardly any cooperation has been extended by the complainants. Such behaviour casts serious doubt on the reliability and authenticity of the complaints themselves. These facts seem to suggest that some of these allegations may have been cleverly stage managed and hence we wish to inform the international community that such incidents would have to be more extensively investigated prior to opinions being expressed about the veracity of the claims.

VII. Economic development

From the first day of his election to

the office of President, the Government of H.E. the President Mahinda Rajapaksa has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to achieve substantial and sustainable economic development in all parts of the country. It is our stated goal to bring prosperity to all citizens of Sri Lanka. It is with that objective in mind that the Government has invested heavily in provincial development. In particular, the Government recognizes that the Northern and the Eastern provinces should be accorded special attention so as to enable these areas to expeditiously recover from the devastation of the conflict and the tsunami.

It is in this context that the Mahinda Chintana has enumerated a series of development projects to expeditiously solve the problems of the people living in the Northern and Eastern provinces. These proposals have been given life through appropriations in the budget that was presented by H.E. the President. As a Government, we are committed towards implementing these projects so as to restore accelerated economic activity.

The Government is also fully aware that the people of the North and the East have suffered tremendously in the wake of the tsunami that struck our country in December 2004. We have already implemented many schemes to provide relief to the tsunami affected people with the consultation and participation of the affected communities.

In our view, certain violations of the ceasefire have resulted in serious economic hardships being caused to farmers, fishermen, and others involved in economic pursuit in the Northern and Eastern provinces. For example, in the Jaffna district, monetary surcharges are imposed on farmers and they also undergo tremendous difficulties in the transportation of their produce. Such factors result in lowering the prices that they could command for their produce. Consequently, their earnings are reduced considerably. The Government of Sri Lanka is concerned about the plight of these farmers and others whose living standards have declined as a result of the restrictive practices imposed by the LTTE. We believe these issues too, should be resolved so as to restore normalcy in the economic conditions in the North and the East.

The Government sincerely believes that taking steps towards establishing a meaningful and effective ceasefire would be one of the most important initiatives to provide for the improvement of the economic conditions of the people in the North and the East.

It is our earnest hope that our discussions would pave the way for the realization of such a ceasefire, which would thereby lead to a peaceful environment that is so important for economic development and investment.

VII. Concluding Remarks

Hon. Minister Erik Solheim and the Facilitation team, Mr. Anton Balasingham and members of the LTTE delegation, our talks today marks a new beginning. Given the pragmatism, courage and farsightedness of H.E. the President, we are confident that this beginning could be nurtured towards the achievement of the goals we have set ourselves.

We recognize, however, that the path ahead is likely to be one of challenge and complexity. Nevertheless, we sincerely believe that we should leave no stone unturned to bring about a peaceful environment in our country. We fervently hope that the LTTE would also respond with sincerity to develop a framework that would result in the cessation of hostilities and embark on the path of non-violence. ❑

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THE GENEVA TALKS
Political antecedents, expectations and the elephant in the room

Rajan Philips

Erik Solheim put it aptly: the talks went beyond expectations. The previously much maligned Norwegian peace facilitator would have left Geneva a justifiably gratified man. For what began as a confrontation between strident antagonists ended on a note of co-operative antagonism. That is the way it should be in negotiations between such entrenched disputants as the government and the LTTE.

The series of talks spearheaded by the Ranil Wickremasinghe government soon wore themselves out by the cynical and consumerist globe-trotting and the all-too-cosy ambience. G.L. Pieris and Anton Balasingham left their teams behind and became co-operative partners in denial of the deep divisions that they were supposed to bridge for the sake of everyone else. It was for this reason, primarily, that the Oslo declaration affirming a joint-commitment to explore a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka did not find much acclaim beyond the immediate participants. What should have been a momentous outcome came out as a political damp squib.

Political Antecedents

Mr. Wickremasinghe's singular achievement was the ceasefire agreement that ended an otherwise unstoppable war. But it also created the impression, not unjustifiably however, that the agreement was a sweetheart deal for carving up Sri Lanka for political power sharing between the UNP and the LTTE. While pussy-footing the LTTE around the world, Wickemasinghe in his own Machiavellian way set about creating an international safety net to contain the LTTE. He paid the price for this when the LTTE withdrew its anticipated support for him in the last presidential election.

Wickremasinghe's political failings, on the other hand, cost the peace process and frustrated his presidential ambitions. For one, he was unable to cohabit with President Kumaratunga until the Supreme Court (with its ruling on the length of her second term) turned her into a lame duck. For another, he just could not manifest, or even pretend, any semblance of nationalism in his politics and in his personality. He personified a fictional American viceroy, or an effeminate caricature of Sir John Kotelawala, neither of which carries much currency in contemporary politics. After a succession of electoral setbacks, Mr. Wickremasinghe may now resign himself to reflecting in front of his washroom mirror: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the unluckiest of them all?"

Exceeding Expectations

Some of us, who welcomed and even defended his ceasefire initiative for its objective benefits regardless of his subjective motives, also opined that Ranil Wickremasinghe was politically incapable of carrying the peace process beyond the ceasefire. Anyone could have predicted that President Kumaratunga's highhanded dismissal of the Wickremasinghe government and her attempts at constitutional machinations were not going to either help the peace process or extend her tenure. To the credit of both of them, however, it must be said that they kept the ceasefire agreement and the goal of devolution atop the political agenda. Paradoxically, the success of the ceasefire and the unlikelihood of war encouraged the hardliners among Sinhalese, the JVP and the JHU, to oppose the ceasefire agreement and the proposals for reforming the unitary state to accommodate the minorities.

Many of us were therefore disappointed when Mahinda Rajapakse, in positioning himself as the progressive presidential candidate, repudiated both the ceasefire agreement and the agenda of devolution in his pre-election agreements with the JVP and the JHU. We felt that he could have reached an agreement with the JVP without compromising on devolution and that he could have won the election without the two agreements. Others uncharitably called him a warmonger and a hardliner. It is fair to say in retrospect that Mahinda Rajapakse used the agreements with the JVP and the JHU to serve two essential electoral purposes within the Sinhala polity. First, he used them to show that the political formation represented by the SLFP is not the patrimony of the Bandaranaike siblings and that he could win an election for the SLFP without their support.

Second, he showed the UNP that even after thirty years of 'open economy', class-politics in Sri Lanka is not dead. In fact, it is very much alive. Political leaders can ignore only at their peril, the seething resentment of the have-less rural and urban under-classes among the Sinhalese who have hardly benefited from the spoils and profits of the open economy. It is this resentment and the anger over government corruption that eroded the widespread support that the Wickremasinghe peace initiative initially enjoyed, and facilitated the emergence of the JHU and the consolidation of the JVP's opposition to the ceasefire agreement and the devolution proposals.

Despite his agreements with the JVP and the JHU, President Rajapakse has shown the capacity to mend his ways when confronted by local and global realities. The Geneva talks are indicative of his evolving position on the peace process, and he is proving that he is capable of more flexibility than what others expected of him including the JVP and JHU leaders. He is also laying down his own markers, quite different from those of Kumaratunga and Wickremasinghe, and what is of interest now is their implication for the future talks and the peace process itself.

First, there is more consultation than before within the Sinhala polity and greater involvement of parliament in the peace process. Second, the preparation for the talks has been more comprehensive and even adversarial. Third, the concerns of the Muslim and human rights issues among the Tamils have been given more prominence in the Geneva talks than at any time in the past. Finally, the talks showed that the government delegation is prepared to play hardball at the talks rather than indulging in vacuous pleasantries.

And so, as I noted at the outset, the Geneva talks started on a note of stri-

dent antagonism. With LTTE always used to playing hardball, at the table or in the battlefield, the talks became an even contest. Documented and undocumented accusations were hurled at each other, legal points were raised and refuted, acrimonious parsing over words ensued, and the plight of the children was discussed not only from the political but also from parental standpoint. In the end, the two sides became cooperative antagonists and evened out the gains and losses of the talks.

The government side could not take its hated word 'agreement' out of the final statement, and the LTTE could not insert into it its cherished word 'paramilitary'. The LTTE committed itself to ensuring that there will be no attacks against government security forces and police, while the government gave the commitment that it will not allow armed groups, other than the security forces, to carry arms or conduct armed operations. If indeed the government's case that the recent attacks against its security forces are the work of the LTTE is very plausible, it is also equally plausible that the so called armed, or 'paramilitary', groups have been attacking the LTTE with the help of the security forces.

The real question is not who is attacking whom, and whose actions are legal or defensible, but how and when will the government and the LTTE bring the recurring acts of violence and the violations of human rights and property rights (of the people in the High Security Zones) to an end? The people of Sri Lanka, especially the victims of war and the tsunami, deserve to be left in peace and given the support to restart their normal lives. Without violent distractions, the government, the LTTE and other political stakeholders can proceed to address outstanding political issues and establish a new constitutional foundation for lasting peace.

The February talks in Geneva were only a small step in this direction and all efforts should be to build on the common statement after the talks and move forward.

This is not the time for the two parties to waste their energies on unnecessary legal pettifogging and pointless gamesmanship, that they have been indulging in after leaving Geneva. There is no justification for either side to be arrogant or triumphalistic. The two parties would do well to bear in mind that they are not in a court-room or before a tribunal, but only in front of each other. In the end they have to persuade each other to an agreeable middle ground if they are to save their armies from having to kill each other and other innocent people. Both sides would also do well to show some humility and even shame while showing off Lanka's bloody linen before the eyes of the world.

The Elephant in the room

Although the two negotiating teams are avoiding it for now, the elephant in the room is the question of devolution. Like D.H. Lawrence's Elephant in the Kandy perahara, the devolution elephant is now "passive with patience', but can turn into "rage" without much warning.

Ceasefire and humanitarian issues deserve the utmost priority, but the two sides will have to deal with the beast sometime in the future, assuming that the talks will purposefully continue towards some finality. Even if the current rounds of talks were to break down, the devolution issue will be the central issue in any further attempt to find a political solution to Sri Lanka's national question.

Much of the so called discourse on devolution in the recent past has been influenced by the 'grand language' of sovereignty and self-determination. Grand language by its very nature shuts out the nuts and bolts, or the anatomy, of devolution. There is a need to address the practical questions about the status of the existing legislative and administrative institutions and the changes required to implement a program of devolution. There will be implications for judicial institutions as well, but they will not be critical to implementing a program of devolution.

Put another way, the experience of the Provincial Councils, the Administrative Districts now mostly under Central control and the plethora of Local Government bodies will have to be assessed and their future roles defined in a new devolution program.

A brief discussion along these lines took place last September, in Colombo, when some friends of Rev. Paul Caspersz, the Jesuit of Kandy whose half-a-century of priestly vocation has been a suffusion of the spiritual and the secular, usurped the occasion of his eightieth birthday for some secular political brainstorming. One of the ideas that came up was about the recent devolutionary changes in the British polity and their applicability to Sri Lanka.

This was before the presidential election. After the election, and perhaps trying to reconcile his agreement with the JVP/JHU and the inevitability of devolution, President Rajapakse has alluded to the possibility of using the British model to implement maximum devolution within a unitary state. The cynic will say, 'What's in a name? That which is unitary could by some other name be as devolved as federal!' Be that as it may.

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Let us look at Britain, the colonial source of all our political institutions but not all our political troubles.

The British model

Within the last decade Britain has created three devolved units in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each shaped by its own specific historical circumstances as well as political, social and economic priorities. First came the 1998 Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland, followed by the Scotland Act of the same year and the election of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and finally the creation of the Welsh National Assembly also in 1999. Northern Ireland and Scotland have full legislative and executive powers over most domestic political and policy issues, while Wales has secondary legislative and full executive power over a smaller range of subjects.

Remarkably, the 'English nation' along with the central institutions of the British state has been left alone. Little has changed since devolution in either the government machinery in Whitehall or in the mother of all parliaments at Westminster. There has been no political devolution within England but a layer of 'regional governments' has been introduced over England's well established local government base. The 'Greater London Authority' is England's first regional government. Tony Blair's Labour government has also established eight Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) without elected assemblies for the purpose of addressing persistent regional inequality.

The government's plan to create elected assemblies in these regions was soundly rebuffed by the voters in the November 2004 referendums held in three (North-East, North-West and Merseyside and Yorkshire/Humberside) regions where support for elected assemblies seemed most favourable. The government has indefinitely postponed the idea of elected regional assemblies. So the RDAs will continue with their 12-member boards drawn from local councils and private businesses, and 100-member staff complements drawn from existing government functionaries. The money allocated to RDAs will thus be spent on new programs rather than new payrolls.

Sri Lankan possibilities

What is in all of this for Sri Lanka? First, the British model indicates some possibilities for the Sinhala nation in the South. Anecdotally it is known that one of J. R. Jayewardene's reasons for creating Provincial Councils in the South was to dispel criticisms that special institutions were being created only in the North and East. However, there has been no great public enthusiasm for the Provincial Councils in the South. On the contrary, there is a great deal of public cynicism about the Provincial Councils that they are all new outlets for more waste, corruption and expenditure without any benefit in return.

The political parties use the Provincial Councils for periodical arm wrestling, but do little between elections to enhance their image and powers. The People's Alliance used the Southern Provincial Council and then the Western Provincial Council as its launching pads to dislodge the UNP out of its 17-year hold on power, but once in power the PA did nothing to improve the PC system.

Both the Kumaratunga and the Wickremesinghe governments had their knuckles rapped by the Supreme Court for encroaching on Provincial jurisdiction. And this was while they were dialoguing even greater devolution with the LTTE. So it is pertinent to ask the question, are Provincial Councils needed in the South?

The government and political parties in the South should address this question independent of their discussions with the LTTE and other Tamil and Muslim organizations regarding devolution in the North and East. The British model shows that unit or units of devolution can be created in the North and East only and leave the South alone. The British model also shows what can be done in the South through administrative decentralization to address the persistent and growing economic disparities between the Western Provinces and the other five provinces in the South.

Sri Lanka can also learn a lot from the British local government system, which is comparable to the Lander system in Federal Germany even though the British state, at least in constitutional theory, is generally viewed as unitary and highly centralized.

Whitehall, for instance, has no field offices or department branches in most policy areas but heavily relies on local government, quasi NGOs ('quangos'), interest groups and professional bodies to implement central programs.

What a positive difference, one might ask, such a system would have made to the tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts in Sri Lanka? Sri Lanka has local bodies but they are left powerless and ineffective by the central government departments who are everywhere.

In addition, Colombo's stifling growth and mounting challenges, in housing, transport, garbage and other services, call for a separate metropolitan administration to deal with them.

I would suggest that the Greater London Authority provides a useful model for a new metropolitan administration in Colombo. Colombo would also do well to have a Mayor like the mercurial London Mayor 'red' Ken (Livingstone)!

The British experience also offers possibilities for the creation of devolved units in the North and East, but I will limit myself only to a few broad comments here. One cannot fail to note the remarkable absence of opposition from the English nation to the creation of the devolved units.

The English are more concerned about being subsumed in a European union than about ceding control to a Scottish Parliament over a third of the British territory with only a tenth of its population.

The main and perhaps the only opposition is the Ulster's Protestant minority who, according to Tom Nairn, happen to be the last repository of " the most backward looking core of Britishism - Monarchy, imperial sovereignty and a kind of spiritual racism". But their opposition could not stop the Good Friday Agreement from laying the foundation for a British-Irish Council of the Isles, yet again an instance of the British state ceding part of its own sovereignty by allowing the Irish Republic a say in Northern Ireland.

Even though Northern Ireland remains the singularly dispiriting part of the British experience of devolution, there is no question that stability in Northern Ireland cannot be realized except by moving forward the agenda of devolution.

Lastly, democracy was not shut out at the creation of any of the three devolved units in Britain. Democracy was present at the creation of all of them, and so it should be if and when devolved units come into being in Sri Lanka's North and East. ❑

Focus should be on human rights in next round of talks

Jehan Perera

In the media conference at the conclusion of the first round of Geneva talks in February, the LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham made a very positive statement. He gave his solemn pledge that the LTTE would no longer engage in the practice of child recruitment. The ruins of the north east economy, which are evident to anyone who cares to travel to those parts, does not provide many of its people to enjoy a dignified existence. The LTTE's chief negotiator explained that the children found in the LTTE had joined due to their lack of alternative opportunities. The earnest manner in which he spoke made it seem that this time around the LTTE would be making a very special effort to end the pernicious practice of child soldiers.

However, the public display by the security forces of two child recruits of the LTTE who claimed to have been conscripted recently and who had escaped last week has once again drawn attention to the gap between the commitments made at Geneva and the reality. The public display of these children has also been criticized as putting those children in jeopardy as they could face retaliation. The legal system in Sri Lanka gives priority to the interests of child victims over other considerations. But by giving priority to the LTTE's conduct with regard to children, the security forces have exposed the LTTE's unwillingness to adhere to the promises made by its negotiating team in Geneva.

According to what the escaped children had said, the LTTE were training many other young children in warfare, even suicide bombing. The revelation by UNICEF that over 1300 child recruits continued to be with the LTTE even after February has further undermined the credibility of the LTTE negotiating team's ability to influence LTTE actions on the ground. Those who insist that others should keep to their word, and criticise those who do not keep to their word, need to be prepared to set the example. It appears, therefore, that the Geneva talks have not led to a change of heart. Both sides have made pledges but neither side is prepared to pay the price of honouring the pledges made by those who negotiated on their behalf.

The opening challenge to the Geneva agreement came within ten days of its signing, when two LTTE cadre were gunned down in the east. The Geneva agreement specified that all killings would be stopped and further that the government would not permit armed groups to conduct armed operations. On the other hand, the killing took place within LTTE territory. There is no doubt that the government has legal expertise on its side that can argue that the government cannot be held responsible for what happens within LTTE controlled territory. The capacity of the government to make such arguments was revealed when its spokespersons claimed that the Ceasefire Agreement was amended by the Geneva agreement.

LTTE attitude

The LTTE is unlikely to take the legalistic arguments of the government seriously if they disclaim responsibility for either ceasefire violations or violations of the Geneva agreement. The LTTE has stated that the Ceasefire Agreement is primarily a political document, not a legal document. The LTTE is also an organization that evolved out of the disillusionment of the Tamil political parties and Tamil people with the broken promises of successive governments. They are wary of being tricked and trapped by legalistic formulations. They are also likely to be less tolerant than the general population when it comes to accepting the turnarounds of Sinhalese-dominated political parties, who make one set of promises and implement something considerably different.

Although the present government has done much better than expected to stabilize the political situation, the government has a serious credibility problem to overcome. What the government is currently doing to advance the peace process has won both local and international acclaim. But the fact is that President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government allies said one thing at election time and are doing much the reverse at the present time. On the other hand, the LTTE has its own credibility problem with regard to keeping its promises. The issue of child recruitment is just one of them. The LTTE's demand that the government should disarm the armed groups, or paramilitary groups, that work against them becomes problematic in the light of the LTTE's past conduct.

The Ceasefire Agreement specified that 30 days after it was signed in February 2002, that all Tamil paramilitary groups should be disarmed. The government at that time implemented this agreement to a great extent. It disarmed the paramilitary groups and sent their members out of the north east. But not too long after when the government and LTTE began to have disagreements on other issues, the LTTE began to relentlessly hunt and kill the disarmed members of those groups. The LTTE's blatant dishonour of the Ceasefire Agreement put the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in a very poor light as having prepared the ground for the killings that followed.

Therefore when the LTTE calls on the government to uphold and respect the Ceasefire Agreement as it promised to do in Geneva, the LTTE needs to realize that this call also applies to them in equal measure. The Geneva agreement has been signed by two parties who have to earn credibility before they can be trusted by either party or by the people. Such a trust cannot be won by mere words or even by solemn pledges that are dishonoured in practice. Trust will also not come from having backdoor channels, as apparently happened at the Geneva agreement when President Rajapaksa's brother reportedly intervened to break the deadlock that had threatened to jeopardize the talks there. Trust will only come from visible change at the ground level that is backed by a mechanism that is based on principle and not mere opportunism.

Best interest

The reason that that those of goodwill, both locally and internationally, are active in supporting the Sri Lankan peace process is that they wish the suffering of the people to end. It is important that the peace process should be one that seeks the transformation of the government and LTTE, and not be one that seeks their entrenchment in the country as they are. The root cause of the ethnic conflict was the lack of democratic opportunities that would have enabled the Tamil community to vindicate their rights and obtain redress to their grievances through

(continued on next page)

Fallacy of an Islamic Jihad in the East

Champika Liyanaarachchi

A gun-toting Muslim militant group hovering around Eastern Muslim towns and hamlets in their black flowing gowns, making an eerie presence in the night, forms an ideal picture of the 'Jihad group' that many here want to see.

Perhaps stories of how this group is funded by militants based in the Arabian countries and Afghanistan add more colour to the 'straight out of story book' account of a Muslim militant group.

In a country where myths and legends rule traditions, a mythical Muslim extremist group, said to inhabit the East - but never seen by anybody – has been a subject at many a fora from time to time.

A section of the media, from time to time, fed the suspense-hungry masses with stories of these mythical Muslim militant groups with banner headlines.

Since the signing of the ceasefire, the geography of the East became more pronounced due to the media highlights of the LTTE attacks on the Muslims at various places in the province. This provided the story-tellers who all this time had loosely set the scene 'in the Eastern Province' to be more specific in their details.

The mythical Muslim militants were conveniently located in the ever volatile Mutur and the country's largest Muslim town Kaththankudy, which was once or twice in the news due to sectarian flare ups.

With both these places remaining areas rarely passed through by the story tellers – mainly Colombo-based political activists, mediamen and even average civilians— the myth continued while the Muslims in the East were left wondering as to where exactly these militants were that others were talking about.

The trend has been for these stories to surface from time to time, without any logical sequence since the propagators of this theory were not looking at serving any agendas when circulating these reports.

However, things took a very sinister turn when the LTTE took this propagation campaign on to their shoulders with the sole intention of blocking the political and economic demands of the Northern and Eastern Muslims who had been at the receiving end of the LTTE's harassment.

Fabricating stories of the presence of extremist Muslim militant groups, the LTTE hierarchy thought, was the best way to drive away the international sympathy, especially that of the United States had on the Sri Lankan Muslims.

The regular statements issued by the US embassy since the signing of the ceasefire – on the LTTE harassment of Muslims, and also the US being the first country to pull the LTTE up for building a camp on the ruins of the earlier Kurangupanchan (Manirasakulam) site, rung alarm bells for the LTTE.

As the lobby for a separate Muslim delegation picked up, the LTTE intensified the campaign to carry regular reports about the presence of 'Al Qaeda' and 'Jihad' groups in the East.

The high point of this campaign was the declaration in Geneva last month that there was a paramilitary group by the name Jihad operating in the East. Quite a dramatic performance by the Tigers to the international audience which was expecting the LTTE to elaborate on the so-called Tamil paramilitary groups it claims that are working with the government security forces!

While the name Karuna may not send shivers through the spines of many global players, the impact of the very mention of Islamic militants, the LTTE knew very well, was enormous.

As the LTTE was threatening to come out with the vital information about each 'paramilitary group', even the locals became somewhat curious to know who really formed the 'Jihad group".

However, when finally the LTTE details of the so-called Islamic Jihad group came out, it only went to prove how farcical the whole LTTE argument was. According to the LTTE, the Jihad in Sri Lanka is led by a Sinhala Army officer and not even a Muslim! Besides, the group hierarchy is an assortment of communities – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. And there are absolutely no details about the base or any other basic information to establish the presence of such a group anywhere in the country.

The Muslims, especially those in the Eastern Province, are understandably livid with the LTTE for these distortions. According to a former President of the Student Union of the South Eastern (Oluvil) University Siraj Mashoor, who also closely associated with the landmark Oluvil Declaration of January 2003, the LTTE has twin goals in its latest propagation of the theory that there are

(continued from page 22)

the democratic process. Today in the LTTE controlled territories there is no democracy. But democracy is in the best interests of the people, and it must infuse the entire Sri Lankan polity.

There are precedents from other peace processes with regard to human rights agreements that ensure that the interests of the people are taken into consideration, not only the interests of the conflicting parties. The Ceasefire Agreement that was signed in February 2002 made the Sri Lankan government and LTTE its two primary parties. But there are others, including the Muslim community and the non-LTTE Tamil parties that have been left out. A human rights agreement that is monitored by independent monitors can be a mechanism that transforms the Sri Lankan peace process into one that takes the best interests of the people into adequate consideration. Civil society and peace groups, both locally and internationally, need to assert themselves to make human rights an agenda item for the second round of Geneva talks in April.

paramilitary Islamic militant groups in the East.

The first is to discredit the Sri Lanka military by promoting the idea that the government security forces were promoting Muslim militarism. The second is to typecast the Eastern Muslims as an extremist community so that whenever it puts forward a demand it could be shot down by dubbing it as one made by the 'extremists'.

Mashoor, who was very much involved in the recent political movements of the Eastern Muslim youth, reminds that the Muslims never thought of grouping themselves into a militant movement even when they bore the brunt of the war for over two decades.

"Though disappointed with the step-motherly treatment meted out to the community during peace initiatives, including the latest, the Muslims in the North and East still have faith in democracy. The Eastern Muslim youth are intelligent enough to differentiate between the good and the bad and also not to fall into anybody's trap," says Mashoor who is based in Akkaraipattu.

In the neighbouring Batticaloa district too the young Muslim rights activists are furious over the manner in which the LTTE misled the international community in Geneva.

A former Batticaloa district member of the SLMM, Abdur Rahman who left the SLMM in a mark of protest against the Wickremesinghe administration's failure to contain the anti-Muslim Valachchenai riots of 2003, challenges the LTTE or any other group to provide evidence of the presence of such groups.

"Eastern Muslims challenge all those who are coming out with these gross fabrications to furnish us with authentic evidence. Nobody will be able to do that because there are no such militant or extremist Muslim groups in the East or any part of the country," says Rahman who is also the President of the East-based Muslim People's Action Front (MPAF). He said the allegations of Muslim extremist groups had been there for over a decade and were raised even when he was taking part at a peace summit in Sweden in 1999. "There itself I challenged those who were making allegations to provide us with the details. Seven years have passed. Nobody has managed to do that," says Rahman based in Kaththankudi.

While the LTTE is propagating the theory of the presence of Muslim militant groups with sinister motives, what is perhaps more unfortunate is, these young Muslims reason out, is the reckless manner some of the Colombo-based senior Muslim politicians speak about the subject.

They charge that in the urgency to ensure that their political demands are met, some of the senior Muslim politicians have developed a tendency to warn others of a future Muslim uprising in the event of a failure to meet the Muslim demands by the state.

The Eastern youth feel that these senior Muslim politicians are only helping the LTTE by creating a fear psychosis among the other communities. While maintaining that senior politicians should act more prudently when it comes to commenting on a sensitive issue of this nature, they caution about the dangers of such comments creating a very wrong impression overseas of the local Muslims.

The crux of their argument is that the political and economic rights of the Muslims should be met because they are the basic rights of any individual and community as recognized by the United Nations and many other institutions.

As for the demand of a separate Muslim delegation at plenary rounds of talks, that is something that the international community led by the four co-chairs had pledged to get for the community – going by the reality – the Muslims form the largest community in the Eastern Province and a sizeable percentage in the North. An unarmed party to the conflict, the Muslims bore the brunt of it and were the victims of an abominable ethnic cleansing by the LTTE. No government has addressed the issue of a return of these IDPs who largely settled in the North Western Province.

Since facts speak for themselves, there is absolutely no need for the Muslim leaders to be mischievous and harp on non-existing militant groups to see that their demands are met. On the other hand, the others who have made the pledges to the community – especially the co-chairs of the Tokyo Donor Conference – have a responsibility to ensure that not only the armed but the unarmed parties, who still have faith in democracy, too will win their basic rights.

(Daily Mirror, 8 Mar 2006)

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HRW sheds light on LTTE fund raising in the West

Tamilweek, March 15, 2006

D.B.S. Jeyaraj

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) has done it again!

The respected US based organization which brought out in 2004 a comprehensive report on recruitment and conscription of child soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has released a new report on the ides of March about fund raising activities by the tigers in the West.

Despite denials by the LTTE the issues of Child soldiers and fund raising by the tigers are well - established facts. The Sri Lankan government and its propagandists try to exploit these problems to their advantage by exaggerated charges, many of them quite unbelievable.

It has been left to organizations such as HRW, Amnesty International etc. to focus attention on these issues in a credible and intelligent manner.

LTTE fund raising in Sri Lanka and abroad is well known. The Tamil Diaspora, dispersed in many Countries from Australia to Zambia , has for long provided material support to the Tamil Liberation struggle. Tamils living in the west being relatively better off financially are a perennial source of revenue.

Milking these cash cows has been two-fold. While some give willingly others have been unwilling and so "milked" ruthlessly through force and intimidation. In order to do this maximum control over the Diaspora is necessary. To facilitate this "hold" terror tactics are practised where all dissent or independence is stifled.

The grip exerted on the community by minions of the LTTE functioning under various "front" aliases is not realised by the mainstream population. What goes on in the new immigrant, visible minorities are not a major concern to the population at large or their governments.

Reports such as the one released on March 15th by the Human Rights Watch are therefore most welcome for shedding light on some dark areas within Western Society. Jo Becker Advocacy director of the HRW who wrote the earlier report on Child Soldiers has written this one too. Becker, as in the case of the earlier one, seems to have done diligent research in compiling this report too.

Exporting terror

The 45-page report, Funding the 'Final War:' LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora, details how representatives of the LTTE and pro-LTTE groups use unlawful pressure among Tamil communities in the West to secure financial pledges.

People were told that if they did not pay the requested sum, they would not be able to return to Sri Lanka to visit family members. Others were warned that they would be "dealt with" or "taught a lesson." One Toronto business owner said that after he refused to pay more than C$20,000, Tamil Tiger representatives made threats against his wife and children.

"The Tamil Tigers are exporting the terrors of war to Tamils living in the West," says Jo Becker, author of the report. "Many members of the diaspora actively support the Tamil Tigers. But the culture of fear is so strong that even Tamils who don't feel they have no choice but to give money."

"Sri Lankan Tamils living in the West fear that if they speak out about Tamil Tiger abuses, they may put themselves and their families at risk," says Becker. "Despite the diaspora's size and potential influence on LTTE practices, the Tamil Tigers' threats, intimidation, and even violence have effectively stifled dissent."

A brief summary of the HRW report provides an insight into the history and background of the problem.

"Between 1983 and 2002, the armed conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) cost an estimated 60,000 or more lives, and was marked by gross human rights abuses and violations of the laws of war on both sides. The war prompted nearly one-quarter of Sri Lanka's Tamils to leave the country, many fleeing government abuses, creating a Tamil diaspora that now numbers approximately 600,000-800,000 worldwide.

As Sri Lankan Tamils established themselves in Canada, the United Kingdom (U.K.) and other Western countries, the Tamil community became a significant source of financial and political support for the LTTE in its struggle to establish an independent state, "Tamil Eelam," for the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka's North and East. While many members of the Tamil diaspora willingly and actively support the LTTE, others have been subject to intimidation, extortion, and physical violence as the LTTE seeks to suppress criticism of its human rights abuses and to ensure a steady flow of income.

Journalists and activists in the Tamil diaspora who openly criticize the LTTE or are perceived to be anti-LTTE have been subject to severe beatings, death threats, smear campaigns, and fabricated criminal charges. In 2005, the LTTE detained two British Tamils for several weeks in Sri Lanka in order to gain control over a Hindu temple in London. Such incidents have created a culture of fear within the Tamil community, stifling dissent and discouraging individuals from organizing activities that are not sanctioned by the LTTE.

Pressure for funds

The LTTE has for many years pressured members of the Tamil community to provide financial support for its operations. In late 2005 and early 2006, as armed violence escalated in Sri Lanka's North and East, threatening the four-year-old ceasefire between the government and the LTTE, the LTTE launched a massive fundraising drive in Canada and parts of Europe, pressuring individuals and business owners in the Tamil diaspora to give money for the "final war." Fundraisers for the LTTE and LTTE-linked organizations went from house to house, and approached businesses and professionals, demanding significant sums of money for their cause. In Canada, families were typically pressed for between Cdn $2,5002 and Cdn$5,000, while some businesses were asked for up to Cdn$100,000. Members of the Tamil community in the U.K., France, Norway, and other European countries were asked for similar amounts.

Individuals who refused were some-

times threatened. Some were told that if they didn't pay the requested sum, they would not be able to return to Sri Lanka to visit family members. Others were warned they would be "dealt with" or "taught a lesson." After refusing to pay over Cdn$20,000, one Toronto business owner said LTTE representatives made threats against his wife and children.

The LTTE and groups linked to it such as the World Tamil Movement repeatedly call and visit Tamil families seeking funds. Some families have received as many as three visits in a single week. Fundraisers may refuse to leave the house without a pledge of money, and have told individuals who claim not to have funds available to borrow the money, to place contributions on their credit cards, or even to re-mortgage their homes.

The LTTE identifies Tamils from the West who return to Sri Lanka to visit family members, and systematically pressures them for funds when they arrive in LTTE-controlled territory in the North of Sri Lanka. The assessed "rate" is often Cdn$1, £1, or €1 per day for the length of time they have lived in the West, so individuals who have been abroad for years may be asked for thousands, and told they may not leave until they produce the requested amount. In some cases, the LTTE may confiscate their passports until the money is paid.

Many members of the Tamil diaspora vividly remember government abuses during the war, and willingly contribute funds to the LTTE. They see the Tamil Tigers as a legitimate and important representative of the Tamil people and their interests. They support the LTTE's goal of establishing an independent Tamil state and the use of military means to achieve that objective.

Other members of the Tamil community do not wish to contribute, either because of their personal economic circumstances, or because they do not believe in the LTTE's goals or methods. Some support Tamil political parties that have been decimated or marginalized by the LTTE. However, under intense pressure or outright threats, these individuals may be forced to provide financial support for LTTE operations, including its continuing pattern of child recruitment, political killings, and other human rights abuses that have continued, even during the four-year ceasefire. "

Revealing testimony

The methodology adopted by the HRW is outlined as follows:

"Human Rights Watch conducted research for this report from October 2005 through February 2006, conducting interviews in person and by telephone with members of the Tamil communities in Toronto, Canada; London, U.K.; Geneva, Switzerland; and Dusseldorf, Germany. The focus of the investigation was on the Tamil communities in Canada and the U.K., as together these two countries host nearly half of the global Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. In both countries, Human Rights Watch interviewed Tamil business owners, professionals, activists, journalists, and other individuals. Most interviews were conducted in English; some were conducted with Tamil translation.

We also talked with representatives of the London Metropolitan Police, the Toronto Police, the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the World Tamil Movement, and independent experts. In February 2006 we submitted questions in writing to the LTTE in Sri Lanka regarding the issues covered in this report, but did not receive a response. In February 2006 we also contacted the British Tamil Association by both telephone and electronic mail with questions related to this report, but did not receive a reply".

Some of the testimonies by those interviewed by HRW are quite revealing and insightful.

"Over the last decade and a half, there have been many incidents like this, mainly against people who attempt to put any ideas against the LTTE or criticism against the LTTE . . . so periodically, there are these attacks to keep the community quiet." Says V. Loganathan, a German Tamil who was physically assaulted in November 2005 after organizing a memorial service for an LTTE critic killed in northern Sri Lanka .

"I used to openly say how I feel, but now am very careful. People who are open get targeted, so their work is very short. You start something, you want to work for human rights, you want to make changes, but the space is very limited." says a Tamil activist in Toronto, Canada.

A Toronto woman pressured to pay a monthly pledge to the LTTE has this to say "My brother's children are in the Vanni [LTTE-controlled territory in the north of Sri Lanka]. The LTTE is collecting money here and using the money to train children to fight and die with the [Tiger] army. The people who collect the money here are living a very good life and drive a nice car. They don't seem to care that it is the children there who are forced to fight and die."

A London Tamil, approached by LTTE representatives in August 2005 says "They asked for £2,000. They said, 'If you contribute here, you can go to Sri Lanka and visit your family. We will give you a PIN number. That number will allow you to move freely in Jaffna. Otherwise, you will have problems. If you don't pay here, you will pay double or triple when you go to Sri Lanka.' "

Because of the significant security risks for Tamils interviewed for this report, the names of most individuals are kept confidential. Some locations and other identifying details are also withheld or changed in order to protect the identity of those who spoke with Human Rights Watch. Some cases reported to Human Rights Watch have been omitted entirely, because it was not possible to describe the reported incidents without putting the individuals involved at risk."

The understandable refusal of affected people to come out openly against the LTTE may have reduced the report's impact. Explicit details of the victims could have added to its value. Nevertheless the meticulous research and documentation that went into the report is discernible. The problem with all its dimensions is encapsulated by HRW.There is an authenticity about it which cannot be dismissed easily.

The HRW has spotlighted the prevailing problem from different perspectives. This is done mainly through direct interviews with affected people though identities are kept secret for obvious reasons. Here are some excerpts -

"The LTTE and its supporters often use family members – both in the West and in Sri Lanka–to convey warnings to dissidents. In Toronto, one activist received a telephone call from a relative saying that an LTTE representative had warned that "If you are not going to control yourself, they will take care of you.".

Overt and covert threats

A London activist who criticized the LTTE on a radio program was later contacted by his brother in Sri Lanka. The brother had been invited to a colleague's home, where he was met by two LTTE members. The LTTE reportedly told him, "Your brother should shut up; otherwise it is not good for him." The colleague later admitted that he had invited the brother to his home under explicit instruc-

tions from the LTTE. The London activist said, "My brother is very worried about his own family."

In many cases, overt or even implicit threats are not necessary to silence LTTE critics. Well-known incidents of killings, assaults, threats, and targeting have prompted members of the Tamil diaspora to police themselves. Relatives often discourage family members from speaking out, worried about possible repercussions, including to family members in Sri Lanka. Continued political killings attributed to the LTTE in Sri Lanka have convinced many Tamils that anyone could be at risk.

One Toronto man involved in a cultural organization that has been repeatedly identified as "anti-LTTE" in the Tamil media described the impact of the LTTE's control over the Tamil community: "Canada is not actually a democracy because we can't even open our mouths against the LTTE. People are scared to open their mouths. Only a small minority are willing to open their mouths and do some small, small work."

In London, a Tamil man who said he was once a strong supporter of the LTTE told us:

"Personally, I supported the LTTE. Ninety percent of our people support them. Most of the people are behind them, even if you don't take the gun, we support them. But later on, things change and certain groups are targeted. Whoever questions them. We can see their behavior. Whoever asks questions about their activities, they don't let them live. You don't have any freedom of speech. I was very quiet for some time, having family in Sri Lanka, so I kept within limits. I didn't want to expose myself. I can see by experiences that if I do anything, there is a lot of reaction. . . . I'm concerned about my life and my family. The community is very scared."

A Toronto Tamil who was once targeted for her activity in a multicultural organization, said, "I used to openly say how I feel, but now am very careful. People who are open get targeted, so their work is very short. You start something, you want to work for human rights, you want to make changes, but the space is very limited."

World Tamil Movement

Mr. Sithampalam , president of the World Tamil Movement has been interviewed. The WTM is the acknowledged front otganization of the LTTE in Canada. Mr. Sittampalam insults the collective intelligence of the Canadian Tamil Diaspora by blandly denying the fund raising. This despite the case of Manickavasagam Suresh, former WTM administrator who was issued a national security certificate on charges of being a Tiger fund - raiser.

When asked about the World Tamil Movement's relationship to the LTTE, Sittampalam told Human Rights Watch, "We are sympathetic to our cause there and because the LTTE is fighting for our rights and in the vanguard we have always campaigned to help them." The organization's website prominently features quotes from LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

However, Sittampalam denies that the World Tamil Movement collects funds directly for the LTTE, or for any other organization. He told Human Rights Watch: "We don't raise funds, but we canvas and advise people to help our people there [in Sri Lanka] for rehabilitation from the war and the tsunami. . . We ask them to give it to the TRO [Tamil Rehabilitation Organization] or SEDAT [Social and Economic Development Association of Tamils]. Some give to the TRO branch here, or some give bank to bank transactions. People do it individually in their own way."

When asked about reports that representatives from the World Tamil Movement ask directly for money, Sittampalam responded, "I think that is not correct. We are asking them to help these people and send it [the money] themselves." He also denied that the World Tamil Movement collects money for the LTTE. "We do not say, 'Give it to the LTTE.' There are no LTTE here who are asking for money." This statement is contradicted by numerous testimonies collected by Human Rights Watch.

In a bid to elicit the LTTE viewpoint on the issue a questionnaire was sent to the Tiger leadership in Sri Lanka. There was no response. If Mr. Sittampalam , by blatant denial, muddled up an opportunity to present the LTTE case on the subject , the Tiger hierarchy has let it suffer through default.

The LTTE is yet to realise that as an organization claiming to represent Sri Lankan Tamils it should present its side of the issue in public fora instead of adopting silence. This "silence" does not help in making the problem go away but serves as a damning indictment.

The HRW report observes that "the LTTE's dependence on the Tamil diaspora for financial support, and the diaspora's substantial size and influence, give the diaspora unique potential to influence the LTTE's policies and behaviour, including its human rights practices. However, that potential has been effectively neutralized by the LTTE's effective use of intimidation and extortion within the community".

Apathy of western govts.

The report also notes the apathy or lack of concern shown by Western Governments and law - enforcing authorities on the matter." The governments of countries that host substantial Tamil populations have a responsibility to protect individuals from these abuses. However, government authorities admit that responding to such activity has not been a high priority, and they have taken little action to respond. Although fear within the Tamil community has resulted in few individual complaints to the police or other law enforcement, clear patterns of intimidation and extortion should prompt proactive government action, including police investigations, prosecutions, and public outreach to the community to publicize individuals' rights and avenues of complaint." points out the HRW in the report.

Human Rights Watch has urged government authorities in Canada and the U.K. to take stronger steps to protect members of the Tamil diaspora from violence, intimidation and extortion. The report recommends the creation of an inter - agency task force to investigate intimidation and extortion linked to the Tamil Tigers, public education campaigns in the Tamil community to publicize relevant laws and available avenues of complaint, establishment of special hotlines for victims of intimidation or extortion, and meetings with the Tamil community to discuss concerns related to LTTE activities.

"This is not just a matter of responding to isolated criminal acts, but protecting an entire community's right to live without fear," says Jo Becker. "In a multicultural society, governments cannot treat this simply as a Tamil problem. This is a Canadian problem and a British problem."

The HRW has also appealed to the LTTE and related organizations to immediately stop all use of violence, threats, intimidation and harassment to solicit funds from the Tamil community, includ-

ing among the diaspora and from members of diaspora communitieis making return visits to Sri Lanka;

It also urges them to immediately stop all use of violence, threats, intimidation or harassment against Tamils who express criticism of the LTTE or organize events or activities independently of the LTTE.

Call to Tamil Diaspora

As far as the Tamil Diaspora in the West is concerned the HRW calls upon them "when it is possible without undue personal risk, ensure that funds provided to organizations in Sri Lanka are not directly or indirectly benefiting the LTTE so long as the LTTE continues to commit serious human rights abuses.

It also entreats them to seek opportunities to promote human rights within the Tamil community, including dialogue regarding the community's role in improving the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

As the HRW report correctly notes, "many members of the Tamil diaspora do willingly and actively support the LTTE"; But there are "others have been subject to intimidation, extortion, and physical violence as the LTTE seeks to suppress criticism of its human rights abuses and to ensure a steady flow of income". It is these sections who need protection.

Realistically Tiger fund raising cannot end unless the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka itself ends through a negotiated settlement with justice, honour, equality and democracy for the Tamil people. Effective steps must be taken however to protect and safeguard people who do not want to give money to the LTTE and this is the underlying focus of the HRW report.

The HRW in general and Ms. Jo Becker in particular are to be commended for this praiseworthy effort. Anyone desiring insight into how the LTTE generates funds overseas from members of the Tamil community and how it suppresses free expression through terror tactics need to read this report.

Meanwhile it is up to the various Governments, Law enforcement agencies, media, the Tamil Diaspora and the tigers themselves to draw their lessons from the report and act accordingly.

The LTTE in particular must wake up to current realities and transform their attitudes and approaches. Western Governments and mainstream media too cannot ignore this problem and pretend it just does not concern them. It is their problem and hopefully the HRW report may help them realise that. ❑

People & Politics

● Prof Hoole, VC of Jaffna University

Sri Lanka University Grants Commission (UGC) announced on Thursday (9) the appointment of Prof. Ratnajeevan Hoole, Professor Peredeniya University and member of (UGC), as the new Vice Chancellor (VC) of Jaffna University by Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse. He will succeed Prof. S. Mohanathas whose tenure will expire at the end of March.

Holder of DSc London degree, the Prof. Hoole has authored several books and articles in engineering. In the nature of a true academic, he has also authored seminal books and papers in the humanities and social sciences to match many an arts professor.

In the election for the post of Vice Chancellor, Prof. Hoole was one of the three elected along with Prof. Kumaravadivel and Prof. Kandasamy, according to Jaffna campus sources said. It is said that Prof. Hoole had initially entertained doubts about accepting the post due to the present circumstances that prevail in Jaffna where the assertion and exercise of academic freedom can cost one's life. However, according to his university colleagues, because of his commitment to make a contribution to the Jaffna university, he decided to accept the appointment.

A man with a broad vision, Prof. Hoole, making the 2004 annual Prize Giving Day at St. John's College Jaffna, drew on "spirit of The Johnian" in laying out a humanitarian treatise of education. He called on the youth to be empowered by education, envisioning the humanity in all and be able to feel and cry for each other.

"Whether we will ever accomplish an egalitarian Sri Lanka where all can live happily and securely is in your hands, in the hands of you, the youth of our country. You must be empowered by education that aims to teach you your rights and responsibilities in the new world order. Our time, the age of my generation, is seeing the setting of the sun upon us. Tomorrow's dawn would usher in your time when you lead us," Prof. Ratnajeevan Hoole said.

"You must ensure that you do not make the same mistakes that our generation made. Be aware - be warned - that you as our offspring are susceptible to the poisons of communalism, national hegemony and ethnic supremacy that overcame us and ruined our generation.

"Prepare yourselves earnestly for your times that will soon be upon us. The key to that preparation is recognising the humanity in all of us and being able to feel and cry for each other.

"The spirit of St. John's must be to prepare the youth for this mission. St. John's must break out of the typical parochialism of old-boy networks into the new order of multiculturalism. To paraphrase the British Minister for Overseas Development, the Johnian must be world class."

However, the appointment of Prof. Hoole appears to have raised the ire of the LTTE leadership and reportedly Tamil National Alliance MPs led by its leader R Sambandan at a recent meeting with President Mahinda Rajapakse had requested that his appointment as Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaffna be cancelled. It is learnt that the TNA parliamentarians had no doubts about the suitability or qualifications of Prof. Hoole, but were only raising the issue on behalf of the LTTE. In the meantime, an effigy of the Professor was seen fastened to the gates of the Jaffna campus with a placard denouncing him.

M. K. Elelaventhan of the TNA demanding immediate cancellation of the appointment is quoted as saying "This is unacceptable. He is academically qualified. No one will challenge that," but accused him of being blind to the suffering of the Tamil people adding that both Hoole and his brother were intellectual "sell-outs," and dismissed them as collaborators whose thinking is not in tune with the Tamils.

It appears that the main objection for his appointment from the LTTE is that Prof. Hoole's brother, Mr Rajan Hoole is the joint-author of the book 'Broken Palmyra' and also is connected to the University Teachers for Human Rights which periodically publishes reports

covering violations of human and democratic rights.

Veteran TULF leader, Mr Anandasangaree, commenting on the subject in a press release states Prof. Hoole's achievements in the academic field and his capabilities are, if not known to the other members, very much known to Sambanthan who headed the deputation. "Prof. Ratnajeevan threw away very high positions abroad that came his way and returned with a heap of achievements to his credit, to serve his country. When the opportunity came his way to serve his people, his life long ambition too, he accepted the office of Vice-Chancellor of the Jaffna University. The students of the Jaffna University welcomed his appointment, in large numbers."

Prof. Hoole reacting to the reported objection to his appointment said, "I am making inquiries to see whether they have any valid reasons" adding he is talking to various people regarding this. Working with the Sri Lankan university system since 1996, he is senior professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Peradeniya. ossessing doctorate (DSc), Hoole had been in the US for 17 years before his return to Sri Lanka in 1996. "I am only trying to serve my people," he said, adding that he was recommended by the Jaffna University Council.

● Space fiction guru on changing times

Mar 14 - British science fiction guru Arthur C Clarke has asked Sri Lanka not to change the standard time after a 10-year experiment on daylight saving and asked India to put the clock forward and join Colombo in a common time zone.

President Mahinda Rajapakse has ordered that Sri Lanka go back to original standard time, five-and-a-half hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), which it followed till May 1996. The government then advanced the clock by an hour to extend daylight hours in May 1996 and by October that year brought the time back to put Sri Lanka six hours ahead of GMT.

Clarke, 88, who has made the island nation his home, said he hoped "wiser counsel would prevail" and Sri Lanka will scrap plans to put the clock back by half-an-hour from April and revert to a time zone it shared with India till May 1996. The celebrity author urged India to advance its clock by half an hour to make that country six hours ahead of GMT instead of 5.30 as it is now.

"In today's rapidly globalising world, Sri Lanka cannot afford to keep changing a fundamental attribute like standard time every few years," Clarke said in a statement.

"Such a move would harm the perception of foreign investors, international banks, airlines and tourists — at a time when we are trying to attract them all."

He admitted that children had to wake up early to leave for school, but argued that they now had an extra half hour to play in the evening and urged that school opening time be pushed back.

If the Government is not persuaded by Arthur C Clarke, the island is set to return to five and a half hours ahead of GMT with the dawn of the traditional New Year on April 13, moving back to the same time as India.

● Memorial Scholarship

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has decided to establish a "Lakshman Kadirgamar Memorial Scholarship" in appreciation and recognition of the services of late Minister. The decision came following an invitation by Sri Lanka to the world body to commemorate the life and work of Mr. Kadirgamar, who had been associated with WIPO, headquartered in Geneva, for more than two decades.

The scholarship is to be awarded -annually to a deserving candidate from the Asia Pacific region to pursue higher studies in the field of intellectual property.

Communicating this decision to the Government of Sri Lanka, the Director General of WIPO, Mr. Kamil Idris said WIPO has lost "an illustrious former colleague".

Describing the long years of Mr. Kadirgamar's service to WIPO, he further said, Mr. Kadirgamar "actively promoted the use of intellectual property rights to achieve economic, cultural and social development in developing countries", and that the contributions he made as a member of the Policy Advisory Commission of WIPO, were notable for their erudition and wisdom. Minister Kadirgamar was instrumental in raising the cooperation between WIPO and the Government of Sri Lanka to the present high level,

● Journalist Wins Award

Mar 11 - Sri Lankan journalist Wijedasa Namini received the Grand Prix Lorenzo Natali Award on March 10 in Brussels, for her article on the recruitment of child soldiers by the Tamil Tigers.

Namini's article, "Blatant Relentless Child Recruitment" covers an issue in Sri Lanka also investigated by Human Rights Watch in a November 2004 report. Despite a ceasefire agreement with the Sri Lanka government in February 2002, the Tigers continued to abduct and recruit children from Tamil families in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, according to the report. Children as young as eleven and twelve are targets of recruitment. Families that do not consent have their children abducted from their homes at night or on their way to school. Those who tried to escape from the camps are beaten in front of other children.

The European Commission annually bestows the Natali Award upon journalists who report on human rights and democracy in various regions. At the award ceremony, Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, said that human rights and democracy are closely linked to economic and social development, which cannot be sustained without democracy and freedom of press. Other journalists commended with the Natali prize are Ahmad Zéïdane Bichara (Chad), Marina Walker Guevara (Argentina), Nick Paton Walsh (UK) and Anne-Marie Jazzar el-Hage (Lebanon.)

- By Chowa Choo,
Epoch Times Sweden Staff

NEWS TRACK

Grenade attack damages house: Feb 22 - Unidentified persons hurled a grenade at a house belonging to a Tamil civilian along Jude's Road in Ward No:01 of Pesalai town in Mannar district on Wednesday (22) afternoon 12.45 p.m. The front portion of the house was badly damaged due to explosion. No one was hurt in the incident, Talaimannar Police said. Mr. Christie Culas, owner of the house was in his communication centre located adjacent to his house at that time of the incident. His daughter was in the rear portion of the house. Both escaped unhurt, police said. Talaimannar Police rushed to site and began investigation, sources said.

LTTE Auxiliary Force cadre killed: Feb 22 - Six gunmen who entered the LTTE controlled area in Pulipaynthakal, 500 meters beyond the no-go zone from Kiran, 25 km north of Batticaloa, shot and killed an LTTE National Auxiliary Force cadre around 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday (22), LTTE's Batticaloa Political Head Daya Mohan told media. The attackers, wearing military fatigues, had come from the Kiran SLA base, he added. The attack was reported three hours before the commencement of talks in Geneva between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE. The auxiliary force cadre killed by the attackers was Shanthakumar Narayanapillai, 28, from Thikiliveddai, Santhiveli, Daya Mohan told media.

Muslim UNP supporter shot dead: Feb 22 - A Muslim supporter of the Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) was shot dead around 8 p.m., on Wednesday (22), allegedly by an armed group at Meerakerny in Eravur, about 14 km. north of Batticaloa, sources in Batticaloa said. Mohamathu Muhaideen Jarool, 28, was shot dead with a T-56 assault rifle, Eravur police said.

Ex-LTTE cadre shot dead: Feb 23 - Mr Navarasan, a former member of the Liberation Tigers, was shot dead in Valaichenai by gunmen suspected to be members of a paramilitary group at 9.45 p.m. on Wednesday (22), sources in Batticaloa said. The incident took place along Vishnu Kovil Road in Kiran. Mr Navarasan was in LTTE three years ago. He is married and his wife is expecting a child, area sources said. No additional details are available at this time. Kiran is located 25 km north of Batticaloa.

2000 destroyed houses to be reconstructed: Feb 23 - The World Bank (WB) funded North East Housing Reconstruction Project (NEHRP) has planned to reconstruct two thousand houses destroyed by war in the Batticaloa district during the year 2006. The beneficiaries will be selected from among the war affected families residing in eighty three villages in eleven divisional secretariat divisions in the Batticaloa district, NEHRP, sources said.

In 2005 only 501 war-destroyed houses were reconstructed by the NEHRP. This year the number of houses has increased four fold due to the successful implementation of the project last year, NEHRP sources said. The villages selected this year are located in the divisional secretariat divisions of Porativupattu, Manmunai South-West, Manmunai West, Manmunai South, Eruvilpattu, Koralaipattu South, Koralaipattu, Koralaipattu West, Koralaipattu Central, Koralaipattu North and Eravurpattu.

Application forms to all war affected families in these villages have been distributed to collect data of damaged houses. These applications are to be scrutinized by a team of officials especially selected for this purpose from each divisional secretariat divisions, NEHRP sources said.

Citizens Peace Committees in Jaffna: Feb 26 - Decision to form Citizen Peace Committees to monitor and report on human rights violations across Jaffna district was taken in a meeting among Secretaries of Jaffna district local councils, presided by Additional Government Agent (AGA), A. Sivasamy, held at the Jaffna district Secretariat Friday, civil society sources in Jaffna said. Head of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, Rohitha Priyatharsana also participated in the meeting.

The primary aims of the new committees are to maintain humanitarian conditions for peace with the aim of creating an atmosphere of normalcy, and to prevent paramilitaries and State armed forces from committing violence against civilians, informed sources said. Citizen Peace Committees will be composed of fifteen representatives in each of the fifteeen regional councils, and are tasked to submit a monthly report on the humanitarian conditions prevailing in their respective regional councils to the District Secretariat, sources said. Easy access to Citizen Peace Committees to register complaints, enabling the Committee to take prompt action against the perpetrators of violations, would serve as a damping factor against the violators, they said.

SLN harasses fishermen: Feb 26 - Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) soldiers from a patrol craft in the Northern seas seized fishing passes from eleven Point Pedro fishermen, destroyed their nets and fishing accessories and chased them back to the shores Saturday, the fishermen said in a complaint to the Vadamaradchy North Fisheries Consortium, according to a TamilNet report. The SLN soldiers also threatened the fishermen the complaint further said. The incident is the recent in a series of continuing harassment faced by fishermen in the northern shores of Sri Lanka, the report said.

India, Lanka to patrol waters: Feb 26 - The coordinated patrolling of Indian and Sri Lankan Navy along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) was formalised on Thursday (23) in Chennai. India's Eastern Naval Commander Admiral Sureesh Mehta said that officers from both India and Sri Lankan Navy had met to work out the arrangements and the modalities would be in place shortly. India and Sri Lanka began coordinated patrolling along the IMBL six months ago on an experimental basis to ensure that there were no instances of firing at genuine fishermen and to prevent criminals from illegally plying between the two countries. Admiral Mehta said that both sides exchanged information on the location of their vessels and details of suspicious activities along the IMBL.

Man found dead with cut injuries: Feb 27 - The body of a young Tamil man was found with cut injuries at Periyakulakkaddu, Paandiruppu in Kalmunai, 40 km. south of Batticoloa, around 8 a.m., Monday (27), police in the south eastern town said. The dead man was identified as Vadivel Perinparajah, 27, of Senaikudiruppu. Natpaddimunai in Kalmunai. He was reported missing Sunday evening, the police said.

Father claims son abducted: Mar 1 - Four un-identified men on two motorbikes on Tuesday (28) around 5.30 p.m. had abducted a twenty-three year old man from Kiliveddy area in Trincomalee. The abducted man's father, A. Kadiragaman, had informed the troops about the abduction of his son, A. Dineshwaram (23) the previous day. Troops however instructed the victim's farther to lodge a formal complaint with the Police but the complainant had not so far reported the matter to the Police. Identity of the abductors or the exact motive behind the abduction is yet to be revealed. The matter was to be referred to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

Bus 'abducted' to LTTE territory: Mar 1 - A private passenger bus, owned by a Sinhalese businesswoman from Sigiriya has been taken to a LTTE controlled area of Karadiyanaru in Batticaloa by its driver, who is believed to be a member of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, military sources said. The sources said the driver had later demanded Rs. 200,000 for the release of the bus. A military official said the bus was plying regularly between Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa and it was forcibly taken to the LTTE controlled area through the military check-point at Black Bridge. Meanwhile, the LTTE had informed the businesswoman Jayanthi Kumari to

appear before the LTTE 'court' in Kilinochchi to get the bus released. The businesswoman was expected to travel to Kilinochchi to appear before the LTTE 'court'. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission was informed about the incident. It is also learnt that there were several such incidents earlier.

Tsunami refugees call off protest: Mar 1 - The sit-in-protest of tsunami-affected families in front of the office of the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat (Muslim) division, which began on 22 February, came to an end after Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse on Wednesday (1) morning assured the refugees through a specially set up satellite link that they would be provided with permanant houses within 3 months. Mahinda Rajapakse told the refugees that he had already taken action to acquire land for this purpose. He further instructed Mr.A.H.M.Ansar, Kalmunai Divisional Secretary to take immediate steps for the acquirement of land for the construction of permanent houses, government officials in Kalmunai said. A committee of three members headed by Mr.Arif Samsudeen, Attorney-at-Law and two other persons appointed by the President would be in charge in implementing the President's assurance, they said.

Affected families thanked the President for the immediate steps by him, sources said.

Satellite-link connection with a large screen was installed in the tent where the affected families held the sit-in-protest staying day and night and cooking their meals. Similar screen facility was also made available in the President's secretariat where President Mr.Mahinda Rajapakse saw the protesting families men, women and children huddled for the last seven days inside the tent in front of the Kalmunai DS office, the sources said.

Weapons training for students? : Mar 2 - The LTTE has allegedly taken 45 students of Hindu College in Chavakachcheri, to an LTTE military camp in Jaffna and given them a one-day weapons training, military sources alleged. They claimed these Advance Level students including four girls, accompanied by two teachers had been taken to the Palai LTTE training camp in two buses on Tuesday (28) morning. They charged the LTTE had informed the principal of the school earlier in the week to send all Advance Level students to Kilinochchi for a 'seminar'. Though there were more than 400 Advance Level students, only 45 had turned up and all of them had been allegedly taken in two buses to the Palai area. They also alleged that at the LTTE camp the students had been advised not to co-operate with the military but help the LTTE fight the military in the future. Later they had allegedly been given weapons training by a senior leader of the camp. Though the students had been dropped at the school by the evening, the principal had not made any complaint regarding the matter.

Explosive coconuts: Mar 3 - Another attempt to transport gelignite sticks to Mannar was averted on 2 March morning when Kurunegala police seized a lorry carrying a load of coconut with the contraband hidden inside, police said. The lorry transporting coconuts was searched on suspicion and the police found 350 sticks of gelignite carefully packed under the coconuts. The police arrested three men who were travelling in the lorry and questioned them for several hours. It was reported the suspects had transported gelignite on earlier occasions in the guise of carrying loads of coconuts to Mannar and other areas. The police have also revealed that the earlier haul of 168 gelignite sticks which was recovered by Excise Department officials in Kurunegala on Wednesday (March 1) is linked to the present incident. This stock of explosives found by the Excise officials was also bound for Mannar, police said. The three suspects were to be produced before the Kurunegala Magistrate.

Missing cadres arrested by SLA – LTTE: Mar 3 - The Liberation Tigers in Trincomalee said Thursday (3) that they have submitted fresh evidence to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to confirm that five of their members who had been reported

missing since 25 February were arrested by Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers. "Our organisation has lodged a fresh complaint based on evidence though eye-witnesses to substantiate our earlier complaint," said Mr.S.Elilan, Trincomalee district political head of the LTTE. He identified the LTTE members arrested as Thaninesan, Isaiyarasan, Velmaran, Pagavathan and Aravinthan. "Today we renewed our complaint made earlier to the SLMM stating that we are in a position to provide evidence to prove our complaint. We are yet to receive a response from SLMM on this matter," Mr.Elilan said.

However, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said it had no knowledge of the alleged army arrest of five LTTE cadres as alleged by the LTTEs or the so called evidence the LTTE says it had given to the ceasefire monitors to prove the allegations. Tthe army also had earlier denied Mr. Elilan's claims saying it was one of many LTTE fabrications.

SLA commander on student activities: Mar 3 - Major General Chandrasiri, Northern Region Commander of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA), ON Thursday (3) at a meeting with five Regional Directors of Education in the Jaffna peninsula, advised them not to permit students to participate in activities outside schools during school hours. Major Chandrasiri summoned the Regional Directors of Education from Vadmarachy, Thenmarachy, Islets, Valikamam and Jaffna regions led by Ms. S. Mahalingam, Additional Director of the Provincial Educational Sector (ADPES) of Jaffna district to a meeting at the Palaly military base and reminded them of their obligation as government employees in fulfilling their duties properly. Making reference to reports indicating that students were being taken to LTTE controlled areas for some form training, Major Chandrasiri also stressed that no student should be allowed to enter or return from LTTE controlled areas during school hours.

LTTE sentry ambushed, two killed: Mar 3 - Two Liberation Tigers cadres were killed Saturday (4) midnight when a heavily armed group of attackers, who entered the Liberation Tigers controlled area beyond the no-go zone in Vavunathivu, launched an ambush on a LTTE sentry point, LTTE's Batticaloa District Political Head Daya Mohan said. A firefight ensued for more than 10 minutes and the attackers withdrew towards Vavunathivu Sri Lanka Army (SLA) base, Daya Mohan added. At least ten Tiger cadres were on duty at the sentry point at the time of the attack which was reported around 00:30 a.m. Saturday. Vavunathivu is located 5.2 km southwest of Batticaloa town.

The Batticaloa Political Wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in a communiqué issued Saturday (4), condemned the attack by the paramilitary cadres working with the Sri Lanka Army (SLA). "We point out that the killings are a gross violation of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA), and provides further evidence that Sinhala extremists, SLA, its intelligence wing and the collaborating paramilitary forces are engaged in nefarious activities designed to trigger an all out war in our homeland to bring further calamity to our people," the communiqué further said.

Meanwhile, the SLMM strongly condemned the attack on the LTTE checkpoint in Vavunathieevu killing two LTTE cadres. This attack is yet another blow to the Ceasefire Agreement and is also seriously undermining both parties commitment to the Joint Statement from the Geneva talks. If such attacks and killings should reoccur SLMM fears that the next round of talks would be put at stake, Head of Mission, Hagrup Haukland said The SLMM urged the parties to do all in their power to maintain the ceasefire and to implement the agreed measures spelt out in the Joint Statement, thus creating and maintaining a stable and safe environment for all, conducive to the Peace Process.

Tigers, military told to dismantle bunkers: Mar 4 - The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said on 3 March that the LTTE and the military were violating the ceasefire agreement by constructing bunkers at Omanthai.

SLMM's acting spokesman Robert Nilsson told a Colombo newspaper that there were complaints from both parties accusing each of constructing bunkers and defence lines.

"Our monitors confirmed that both parties have constructed or repaired their bunkers and defence lines, in what can be seen as a clear violation of the ceasefire agreement", he said. The spokesman said the military and the LTTE agreed to dismantle these constructions soon. "We will continue our investigations into the matter and hope the parties will keep their promises", he added. Responding to SLMM charges the military said it had only repaired a bunker, as it was in a dilapidated condition. "The army had not constructed any new bunkers; we only repaired a broken down bunker", a senior military official in the area said.

Fishing boats donated in excess of need: Mar 4 - The Fisheries Ministry urged donors and NGOs not to donate fishing craft and gear to fisherfolk without consulting the Ministry after reports revealed that there had been an oversupply and imbalance in their distribution. Ministry Secretary E. Jinadasa said donors had given away fishing craft and gear in excess and on several occasions without identifying the needy, whose fishing equipment were destroyed by the tsunami. According to the Fisheries Ministry, 187 multi-day boats, 276 one-day boats, 4,480 outboard machines and 11,158 outboard traditional craft were destroyed in the tsunami. He pointed out that if the distribution of the fishing craft and gear are not done according to plan and if the deserving fisherfolk did not receive them, the country's fishing industry would face future problems.

The Jaffna district had received 1,744 fibreglass boats whereas the number destroyed by the tsunami was 887. The Kilinochchi district which had not lost a single boat to the tsunami had received 10 such boats. The Ampara district lost 358 and has received 360 and Hambantota lost 387 and received 404. The Galle district had received 203 boats in excess whereas it lost only 173. The Kalutara district had received 101 more boats than the lost 148. Colombo lost five boats and had received nine while Gampaha has received 26 after losing 14. Mr. Jinadasa said the Ministry would request the fisherfolk to donate the excess to the Ministry.

Ex-SLA soldier shot dead: Mar 5 - A former soldier of Sri Lanka Army (SLA) was shot dead by an unknown armed group in Oddumavadi, Valaichenai at 5.30 p.m., on Sunday (5), Valaichenai police said. Mohamed Navas, 22, a resident of Division 2 in Oddumavadi, was in the house of one of his friends when three men entered the house, talked to Mohamed before firing at him. Mohamed received three gun shots to his chest from the assailant's 9 mm pistol. Valaichenai police said the motive for the killing is not clear, and are conducting investigations to identify the killers.

Exploring Oil: Bidding to open in July: Mar 6 - The Government has decided to open oil exploration along Sri Lanka's sea belt for bidding in July this year. Transport and Petroleum Resources Development Minister A.H.M. Fowzie told the press that local and foreign investors would be given six months to bid for the venture. "We have made arrangements to commence the bidding in June-July. It will be open until end December. We will evaluate the bids in January 2007 and announce the successful bidder by March," he said.

Exploration activities are scheduled to commence in August 2007. The Minister said the bay of Mannar has been identified for the first phase of exploration. "We have also decided to conduct seismic surveys in the coastal belt along the Kaveri and Hambantota areas. I have directed officials to call tenders for this," he said. According to the Minister, the management and overseeing of oil exploration will be vested in two Government owned companies. In view of the bidding set to commence in July, the Petroleum Resources Development Ministry has launched special advertising programmes to attract internationally reputed firms to take up the exploration of oil deposits. Accordingly, business communities in leading oil trading countries like Iran and the United Arab Emirates have already been made aware of the opportunity.

JHU, JVP critical of Geneva accord: Mar 6 - Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), during the All Party Conference (APC) held Monday (6) at the Old Parliamentary building in Colombo submitted separate memoranda rejecting the agreement made between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers in the talks held in Geneva on 22-23rd February. Leaders and representatives of all political parties except Tamil National Alliance (TNA) participated in the conference. TNA was not invited.

Leader of Sri Lanka Government delegation, Minister Sripala de Silva explained the details of what transpired at the Geneva talks. Somawanse Amarasinghe, leader of JVP, speaking at the conference said, "Geneva talks did not adhere to the Mahinda Chintanya but instead was conducted according to Norway's wishes. Norway has succeeded in fulfilling the demands of the Liberation Tigers. If the Government disarms armed groups as agreed in Geneva, it should also disarm the LTTE. Future talks should ensure that the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) is corrected and amended." Mr Amarawanse also said, the Sri Lanka Government should urgently strengthen Sri Lanka's military.

Ex Army soldier's bullet riddled body found: Mar 7 - The bullet riddled body of an ex-Army soldier was found on Monday (6) morning at around 6.20 a.m. near a Mosque in Meeraodai, Valachchenai in east Sri Lanka. The victim was identified as Recruit S.M. Navaz (25 years) from Meeraodai, Valachchenai, who had gone missing since December 31, 2004. He was found gunned down at pointblank range by an un identified gunman using a 9 mm pistol near the JUMMA mosque in Meeraodai, Valaichenai. The incident has been notified to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission and the Valachchenai police are conducting investigations.

Muslim businessman shot dead: Mar 7 - Mr M Jawfar, 45, a Muslim businessman and a father of a child, died at the Eravur hospital after being shot and seriously wounded by unidentified gunmen on Monday (6) night at 10 p.m. near the Women's Market Road, Eravur-1, sources in Batticaloa said. Jawfar was not affiliated with any political party, his neighbors in Eravur said. Eravur police said, Mr Jawar had closed his shop and had returned to his house when the gunmen shot him and escaped. Eravur is located 14 km north of Batticaloa town.

JVP demands Norway's removal: Mar 7 - Wimal Weerawanse, Propaganda Secretary and Parliamentary Group Leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Permuna (JVP), speaking in parliament said that Norway should be stripped of its facilitator role in Sri Lanka. Accusing Norway of attempting to hold on to its facilitator role for two more years to provide diplomatic status to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and assisting LTTE towards earning international recognition for its Declaration of Independence (UDI) for Tamil Eelam, the JVP's propaganda secretary demanded immediate expulsion of Norway from the peace process. Weerawanse further accused Norway of trying to pave the way for the Declaration of Tamil Eelam by affording diplomatic status to the LTTE with red carpet welcome to LTTE's Political Head S.P. Thamilchelvan when they went to Norway after the Geneva talks. Meanwhile, the Norwegian Ambassador, in press release issued to media on Monday (6), stressed "how important it is for Norway, as the facilitator, to have close contacts with the parties to the peace process in Sri Lanka." He said it was therefore his hope that representatives of both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE would visit Norway and maintain contacts with the Norwegian Government. "Norway plays a neutral role in the peace process. But in order to do that in an efficient manner, it is crucial for us to meet with and listen to the parties," the Ambassador said.

Jaffna student reported missing: Mar 7 - Parents of a seventeen-years-old boy in Jaffna, registered a complaint with Jaffna Human Rights Commission (HRC) office Tuesday (7) that their son, Thushyanthan, has been missing for more than four days. HRC officials said there have been a marked increase in disappearances of persons in Jaffna district the last several days after a decline in the three weeks leading up to talks in Geneva. Poologanathan Thushyanthan, 17, from Brown road, Kokuvil in Jaffna, was reported missing from 2nd March. Thushyanthan's parents have told the HRC that there have no knowledge of their son leaving the peninsula or having crossed over to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) territory through Muhamalai checkpoint.

SLMC rejects 'Jihad' charge: Mar 8 - Sri Lanka's chief Muslim party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), has accused the LTTE of carrying out a 'sinister operation' to link Sri Lankan Muslims with extremist Muslim groups such as Al Qaeda and vehemently denied accusations by the Tamil Tigers that a Muslim Jihadi group was operating in the east of the country.

Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), described as 'preposterous', the claims made by the LTTE who allege that several killings of Muslims as well as Tamils were carried out by an emerging 'Jihad' movement.

Reacting to the allegation made by the LTTE at last month's peace talks in Geneva that a 'Jihadi' Muslim outfit was responsible for several killings in the east and its demand that the government disarm such 'Jihadi' Muslim militant outfits, Rauf Hakeem said, "This is absolute nonsense. We will be the first to know if there is a Muslim militant group operating in the east. Sixty seven Muslims have been killed by the LTTE in the past few months. Are the Tigers now trying to say that Muslims are killing Muslims." He charged that the LTTE accusation was a deliberate and covert plan to tarnish the image of moderate Sri Lankan Muslims and divert international attention away from the killings and terror carried out by the LTTE terrorists.

"We are not surprised if very soon they (the Tamil Tigers) proclaim to the international community that Sri Lankan Muslim groups have links with the Al Qaeda. We have raised concerns about this with President Mahinda Rajapakse," the SLMC leader said, following a private meeting with President Rajapakse on Monday(6).

Bribery, corruption on the rise: Mar 8 - The number of government offices arrested in Sri Lanka in connection with the charges of extortion of bribes or corruption has risen. A report of the Commission to investigate into allegations of bribery or corruption revealed that there is a considerable increase in this regard within the past three years. The Commission handed over a special report on the cases of extortion of bribes of 2004 to President Mahinda Rajapakse recently. According to the report 90 public employees were arrested with regard to extortion of bribes in 2004. The Department of Police is in the top of the list. In addition, offices serving in the Sri Lanka Army, Wild Life, Labour and Cooperative Departments, the Ministry of Justice and the Samurdhi Authority were also arrested in the same year. The Commission says special attention will be focused on taking legal action against the convicted parliamentarians and acclaimed figures.

Rs. 9.5 billion for NE rehabilitation

Mar 8 - The Nation Building and Development Ministry said that Rs. 9.5 billion would be funneled to the North and East of Sri Lanka for rehabilitation efforts this year. Of that, Rs.325 million from the Treasury and Rs. 3 billion in foreign funds are being used for a three-month special development programme for the North and East. Begun in January it will be concluded at the end of this month, said Ministry Secretary M.S. Jayasinghe.

Already Rs.57 million has been channelled by the Ministry into 29 projects in 13 districts which include housing, livelihood and infrastructure development. The Treasury will release Rs. 1.6 billion while the remainder will be made up of funds from foreign donors. He added that the distribution of dry rations in this region for the past year has totted up a bill of Rs.2.4 billion for the 444,000 displaced people. However the amount is expected to halve once 60 000 families in the Jaffna district are given Samurdhi

instead of Government rations.

"The major recovery programmes that remain to be completed are reconstructing the main railway lines from Vavuniya to Jaffna and Madevachchiya to Mannar, rebuilding the ports and completing the 31,000 houses of which five thousand have already been completed and we expect to reach a target of 14 000 by the end of this year," he said. Mr. Jayasinghe revealed that the key project costing Rs.1 billion will focus on rebuilding five main irrigation projects which would include the Iranamadu tank in Killinochchi, the Yoda wewa in Mannar and the Allei tank in Trincomalee. The aim is to renovate all medium sized tanks in the area within the next two years. The Road Development Authority (RDA) and European Commission are reconstructing roads jointly. Accordingly, 500 km of road along with the A9 road and destroyed bridges would be rebuilt by September, he said.

Housing programme for estate workers: Mar 9 - Nearly 20,000 houses for plantation workers have been completed under the Social Welfare Development Programme carried out by the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT), PHDT sources said. The living conditions of one million plantation workers of nearly 200,000 plantation worker families would be improved under the programme. The Trust managed by a tripartite board of representatives from plantation companies, plantation trade unions and Government ministries, operates via seven regional offices in Badulla, Galle, Hatton, Kandy, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya and Ratnapura. The PHDT also carries out health care programmes, including maternal care, immunisation, nutrition, diarrhoea and respiratory disease prevention programmes. While developing the infrastructure facilities of the plantation areas the trust has also set up high quality estate creches which also serve as ideal child development centres.

Bus passenger shot dead: Mar 9 - A young man travelling on a public transport bus from Eravur to Batticaloa was shot dead by a gunman, around 11 a.m., Thursday (9), police in the eastern town said. Two other civilians were injured in the shooting.

The young mason, father of a child, who was killed in the incident was identified as Kovinthan Vijeyarasa, 21, of Arumugaththankudiyiruppu in Eravur. The injured civilans were identified as Thambymuthu Arumathurai, 46 and Manikkam, 55. They were taken to Batticaloa hospital. A TamilNet report alleged that a "paramilitary cadre, Edwinsilva Anandan (Mathushan), fired atleast eigth 9 mm bullets and escaped from the site when his attempt to abduct Kovindan failed, according to the eyewitnesses."

Weapons haul recovered: Mar 9 - Sri Lanka's military on Thursday (9) accused the Tamil Tiger of violating the cease-fire after soldiers uncovered hauls of ammunition and weapons in the country's north.The caches, including three grenade launchers, 13 live magazines for T-56 rifles and some hand grenades, were reportedly discovered in Karaweddi and Tellippalai in the Jaffna Peninsula on Tuesday (8) and Wednesday (8), military spokesman Brig. Sudhir Samarasinghe said. "There is no other group operating in the area other than the LTTE. If they had brought the grenades and hidden them, it is definitely a cease-fire violation," he said adding that the matter has been reported to the SLMM. "We are checking on the details, but if the weapons were found in areas under the control of the Sri Lankan army then it is a violation of the cease-fire," said Helen Olafsdottir, a spokeswoman for the SLMM is quoted as saying.

Navy arrests two dinghy boats: Mar 9 - The navy on 8 March took two suspected LTTE dinghy boats into custody transporting eight men and some explosives in Kachchathivu Sea off Jaffna peninsula. The boats were detected around 3.30am by a naval routine sea patrol unit while speeding across the Kachchathivu Sea. The navy recovered eight gelignite sticks, five detonators and two GPS (Global Positioning System) machines along with the suspects. Eight suspects who were arrested are reportedly fishermen. But the security forces believe they are strongly linked to the LTTE. The navy handed over the suspects to Kayts police for further investigations and to produce in courts later.

Tamil youth shot, injured: Mar 10 - Unidentified gunmen shot and injured a Tamil youth on Friday (10) noon in the village Kanniya located above seven km northwest of Trincomalee. The wounded youth, Suthakar, was admitted to the Trincomalee general hospital with gunshot injuries in his shoulder, Police said. Kanniya village comes under the Uppuveli Police division in the Trincomalee district. The injured youth is a resident of Sivapuram, a village in the Seruvila division, down south of the district. Officials of a NGO who were traveling through the area where the incident took place had transported the injured to the hospital, medical sources said. Officials of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in the east port town visited the scene.

Abdueted youth found with cut injuries: Mar 11 - A Tamil youth who was abducted by three armed men from his home in Erlalai East, Jaffna Thursday (9) at 11 p.m. was found near a cemetary in Chunnakam with serious cut wounds to his body inflicted by a sharp instrument, sources in Jaffna said. Kottiyal Hindu cemetary where the injured youth was found is located in Chunnakam Road, Punnalaikattuvan nearly 3 k.m. south of Erlalai where he was abducted. Only the sound of a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) patrol near the cemetary prevented the armed men from killing Thevarajah Vimalanathan, 26, local residents said.He was taken to the Chunnakam Police and was admitted to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital after nearly seven hours, sources said. Vimalanathan is undergoing emergency surgery and his condition is serious, hospital sources said. It is learnt that Vimalanathan was targeted on suspicion that he was an informant to the Sri Lanka military and police.

LTTE repulses attack: Mar 11 - Liberation Tigers repulsed an attack on its Forward Defence Lines in Kattumurippu in Verugal area Batticaloa district allegedly by the Karuna group on Friday (10) night at 9.30 p.m., according to LTTE sources. More than thirty armed men were reportedly involved in the attack. The attackers fled the scene, carrying the injured and leaving behind ammunitions and several assault rifles, LTTE sources said.

SLN relaxes fishing restrictions: Mar 12 - Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) announced relaxation of restrictions on fishing to the east of Kankesanthurai harbour from Thondamannar to Valvettiturai shores, during a meeting between Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) Jaffna representatives, SLN officers and Jaffna Fisheries Union representatives at Chithampara College, Valvettiturai, held on Sunday (12). SLN also said that old passes distributed by the Ministry of Fisheries will no longer be accepted and that the fishermen should obtain passes with photographs newly being issued by the SLN. Fishermen should submit applications at the SLN's Inparutty camp, the applications will then be forwarded to Colombo from where the passes will be issued, the SLN said.

Following increased violence in Jaffna district during December 2005, the SLN had imposed fishing ban from Mathakal to the West of KKS high security zone to Valvettiturai to the east of the KKS harbor from 1st of January.

SLA rebuilding FDL posts: Mar 13 - Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is reconstructing previously abandoned positions in the Valikkandy area, a border village between Vadamaradchy North and Vadamaradchy east in Jaffna district. SLA soldiers are using large amounts of sleepers brought from Palaly military base for construction of the sentry posts and positions. The rebuilding of Valikkandy checkposts is part of an effort in strengthening the forward defense positions of the SLA in Jaffna district..

SLA's Forward Defense Lines (FDLs) in the Nagorkovil sector of Vadamaradchy North extended from Mulli in Varani through Valikkandy after the capture of parts of Jaffna district in 1995. However, after the MoU was signed in 2002, SLA abandoned some of its FDL camps and sentry points in the Vadamaradchy North, East border. The increasing threat of renewed hostilities with the LTTE is said to be the reason for the SLA's action.

Two 15-years-old boys abducted: Mar 13 - Unidentified men,

riding in a white van on Kalkudah road in Valaichenai, are reported to have abducted two 15-years-old boys around 5:30 p.m. Monday (13). The incident took place in front of the office of ZOA, a Christian International NGO, located close to the Valaichenai Bus stand. Suthaharan Kulosan, 15, Jeyaraj Krishan, 15, and another boy, all students of Valaichenai Hindu College, were cycling while the armed men in the white van abducted the two boys. Kulosan is a son of a retired school teacher of Valaichenai Hindu College, and Krishan is a son of a school principal in Valaichenai.

Army assures rent for occupied land: Mar 13 - Due rent would be paid to the rightful owners of property occupied by the army in Jaffna once the documentation required for the procedure is duly completed by the respective owners, the military assured on 13 March. Army spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasingha told the media that some of the property owners were yet to furnish the relevant documents certifying ownership of the land claimed by them in Jaffna in order for them to receive rent.

The army is already paying monthly rent to several land owners in Jaffna whose properties were taken over during the war and occupied even after the cease fire in 2002. Most of these properties were converted into High Security Zones (HSZ) where army camps and training facilities have now been setup.

"Some property owners don't have the relevant documents to certify their ownership for us to pay them. So we have informed them to furnish the documents and as soon as they do so they will receive rent like the others," Brigadier Samarasingha said.

On Friday (10) civil and religious leaders met the Jaffna army top brass to discuss the rent issue for owners of property in the HSZ and further discussions are to be held after a report is submitted to the Jaffna Government Agent K. Ganesh.

Deputy Minister's stolen vehicle found at checkpoint: :Mar 14 - Deputy Minister Duminda Dissanayake's official vehicle which was allegedly stolen from the Madiwela Ministerial residential complex was detected at the Chettikulam check point on 13 March, police said. Chettikulam police said the driver taking the Intercooler Pajero towards the LTTE controlled area was arrested after being stopped on suspicion and the engine and chassis numbers were checked. The suspect, a resident of Vavuniya said a friend in Mannar had asked him to hand over the vehicle to a person in Vavuniya. Inquiries have revealed that a gang involved in a massive vehicle racket might be behind the robbery.

Seven more youths abducted: Mar 14 - Five Tamil youths, aged between 15 and 20 were reported to have been abducted on Monday (13) around 3:00 p.m. inside the LTTE controlled Murithanai in Vaharai in eastern Sri Lanka. Murithanai is 5 km west of Valaichenai where two youths were abducted on the same day. Further 2 youths were kidnapped in Urani in Batticaloa around 6:00 p.m. on the same day. In all seven youths were reported

Three youths abducted: Mar 14 - Unidentified armed men abducted three youths, two Muslims and one Tamil, on Tuesday (14) early morning at 1 a.m. in Pattanisoor area in Vavuniya in northern Sri lanka, Officer in Charge of Vavuniya Police, Mr Tennekoon, said. According to complaint received at the Police station, five youths were standing together when the armed men arrived. Two of the youths managed to escape and registered the complaint, OIC Tennekoon further said. Police are conducting investigations to establish the identity of the abductors.

Protests against student abductions: Mar 15 - Valaichenai-wide hartal was observed and Valaichenai Hindu College in Batticaloa was closed as protesters demanded the release of students, Jeyaraj Kirisanth and Suthaharan Kulosan, who were abducted two days earlier. All public institutions, shops, banks, and hospitals were closed and the streets were deserted. Security was strengthened with increased police patrols and Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers deployed at several key junctions. Protesters burnt two buses that defied the hartal, one near Vallaichenai Police station and the other near Karuvakerni junction.

Danes move against LTTE front: Mar 16 - Social Democratic Party on Tuesday (14) expelled an elected Councillor of the Herning City Council, Denmark, Arulanantharajah Thillainadarajah, a Sri Lankan Tamil accused of backing LTTE fund raising operations. Meanwhile Justice Minister declared that Tamil Coordination Committee accused of directly involved in LTTE fund raising activity should be proscribed. The minister in a televised appeal urged the Tamil Diaspora to immediately bring extortion attempts to the notice of the police.

Lectures resume at Jaffna University: Mar 16 - Lectures at University of Jaffna suspended from December 2005 due to violence in Jaffna district and the presence of Sri Lanka Army (SLA) troops in the proximity of the university, resumed for freshmen to Senior classes of students Wednesday (15), said an official of the Jaffna University Student Union (JUSU). Only a few out of district students attended the first day but JUSU official said most of the other outstation students would arrive soon. In the meantime, an effigy of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor to the Jaffna University, Prof. Ratnajeevan Hoole, hung by the head was seen at the entrance to the Campus. It is believed that the Tamil Nationalist Alliance MPs have called for Prof. Ratnajeevan Hoole's appointment as Vice Chancellor to be cancelled.

Abducted students released: Mar 16 - Two Tamil students whose recent abduction triggered protests in Valaichchenai in east Sri Lanka returned home on Thursday(16) but they have not revealed who abducted them, police said. Valaichenai Hindu College students, Jeyaraj Kirisanth and Suthaharan Kulosan, abducted Monday (13) in front of ZOA office in Valaichenai in eastern Sri Lanka were released by the captors and arrived at 1.30 p.m. at the Valaichenai Veterinary Hospital in a bus, sources in Batticaloa said. Within ten minutes of their arrival, Valaichanai Police officers arrived at students' homes and took the students to the Police Station for investigations.

Businesses target of grenade attacks: Mar 17 - Unknown group of men hurled hand grenades near business establishments in Vavuniya town Thursday (16) night escalating fear and tension among the Vavuniya trading community which has become the target of several incidents of threats and grenade attacks recently. Vavuniya police said no one was injured in the two attacks. One incident occurred in front of a shop selling softdrinks in Vavuniya town at 8.20 p.m., and another explosion occured at 9.00 p.m. in front of the house of a businessman who owns a hotel in Vavuniya town, sources in Vavuniya said.

US court orders release of detainee: Mar 17 - A U.S. court ordered the government on Friday (17) to release a Sri Lankan who has been imprisoned for five years after he tried to enter America seeking asylum from alleged torture in his home country. Ahilan Nadarajah, a 25-year old member of the Tamil ethnic minority on the island nation, was tortured by government troops at his home in the Jaffna peninsula of northern Sri Lanka on suspicion that he was a member of the separatist Tamil Tigers group, according to court papers. He attempted to enter the United States illegally in 2001, and has been detained ever since without being charged with any crime.

"We conclude that the general detention statutes relied upon by the government do not authorize indefinite detention," Judge Sidney Thomas wrote for a three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. "When examined under the analysis prescribed by the Supreme Court, Nadarajah's detention is unreasonable, unjustified, and in violation of federal law." The decision cited an earlier Supreme Court ruling finding that detention for a period of six months is permissible in such cases only if removal is soon likely."A detention of nearly five years - ten times the amount of time the Supreme Court has considered acceptable absent a special showing - is plainly unreasonable under any measure," the judge wrote. ❑

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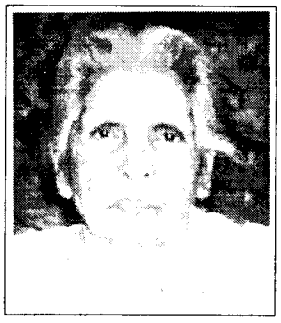

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The family wishes to thank all those who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathies and floral tributes and assisted in various ways during this period of sadness.

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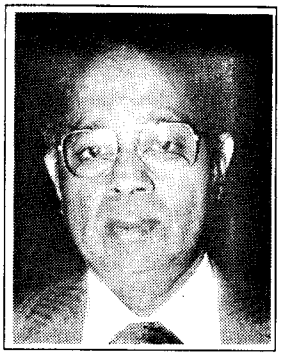

In ever loving memory of ***Dr. N. Sahadevarajan*** *on the third anniversary of his passing away on 14th March 2003.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his beloved wife Thabonithy; loving children Rajkumar, Niranjala and Girija; daughter-in-law Dr. Jane Rajan; sons-in-law Dr. Ravindran and Dr. Kesavan; grandchildren Dr.Vanaja, Dr. Roshan, Catriona, Duncan, Tamara, Devan and Evan.

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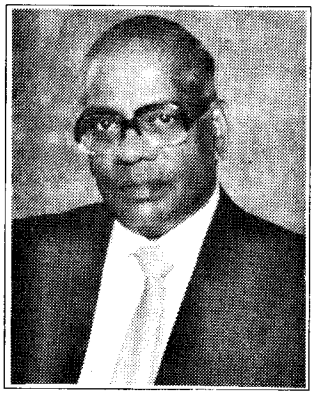
Fifth Anniversary Remembrance



In ever loving and treasured memory of ***Dr. Nagalingam Kandasamy*** *on the fifth anniversary of his passing away on 16th March 2001.*

Affectionately remembered and sadly missed by his loving wife, daughter, sons, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

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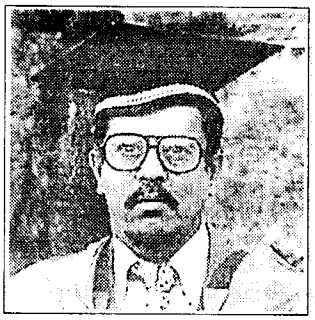
Second Year Remembrance



In ever loving memory of ***Mr. Ramasamy Vijayaratnam*** *B.Sc. Eng. Hons (Sri Lanka), M.Eng (AIT- Thailand), C.Eng., MIE (SLIMASCE); former Head of Dept. of Agricultural Engineering, University of Jaffna on the second anniversary of his passing away on 2nd March 2004.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Selva (Research Station, Thirunelvely, Jaffna; loving children Purushowththaman, Jaffna Hindu College and Toothiransali (Chundikuli Girls' College). He was brother of Vijiyakumar (Jaffna), Vijayadevi, Vijayarani and Jegasothy (all of London); brothers-in-law Nathan, Sundaralingam, Thillainathan (all of London), Naguleswary (Jaffna); uncle of Anand, Meni, Luxey, Vasanth (all of London) and Periappa of Luxana (Jaffna)

You have never left our hearts and our thoughts as we remember you in our daily life. We will treasure your love, wisdom and beautiful memory for ever.

-11 Bulstrode Avenue,
Hounslow, Middlesex TW3 3AA, UK.
Tel:020 8577 6377.

Anniversary Remembrance

In ever loving memory of ***Miss. Rathini Ananthamoorthy****, Lecturer, Eastern University of Sri Lanka, on the 14th Anniversary of her passing away on March 5th, 1992.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her father Ananthamoorthy; mother Yogarani; brothers Sivapalan, Sivakaran; sisters Mathini, Malini, Rajini, Sivarubini; brothers-in-law; sisters-in-law, friends, relatives, students and staff, Uastern University

.- 30 Hanson Road
Apt.507, Mississauga,
Ontario L5B 3A7, Canada.
Tel: (905)566 7509.

Fifth Anniversary Remembrance
Mrs. Somawathy Kanagasabai

Birth: 26.01.1916 **Rest: 17.03.2001**

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by children Chandra, Indra, Logendra, Yogendra, Ambi, Gowri and Jayanthi; daughters-in-law Sakunthala, Kamalasani, Rathy and Yoga and son-in-law Ragu.

- 34 Woodcote Valley Road,
Purley, Surrey CR3 3AJ.

Forthcoming Events

April

1 *Karthigai; Chathurthi*
2 *Feast of St. Francis of Paola*
3 *Sasti; Panguni Pongal (3)*
4 *Feast of St.Isidore*
6 *Sri Rama Navami*
7 *Feast of St.John Baptist*
8 *11 a.m. Colombuthurai Yoga Swamigal Abhisekham and Guru Poojah followed by Prasatham at Shree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW19. All welcome.*
9 *Eekaathasi*
10 *Pirathosam, Panguni Pongal (4)*
11 *Panguni Uththiram; Feast of St. Stanislaus*
13 *Fullmoon; Feast of St. Martin*
14 *Viyaya Hindu New Year's Day*
16 *Sankadakara Sathurthi*
21 *Feast of St. Anselm*
23 *Saint Thirunavukkarasu Nayanar Guru Poojah; Feast of St. George, Patron of England*
24 *Eekathasi*
25 *Pirathosam; Feast of St. Mark*
27 *Amavasai*
28 *Kaarthigai*
29 *Feast of St. Catherina of Siena*
30 *Chathurthi*

At Bhavan Centre,
4A Castletown Road,
London W14 9HQ.
TeL: 0207 381 3086/4608

Apr 6, *1900 SRI RAMA NAVAMI Devotional songs, dances, traditional Puja and Abhishek followed by dinner. All welcome.*

Apr 9, *1800 Mahabharat in Bharatanatyam Style by Shridhar and Anuradha Shri dhar Both are considered to be one of the finest dancing couples of India.*

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SIVAN ARUL ILLAM (ORPHANAGE)
A Safe Haven for Orphans and Children Displaced by Tsunami in Sri Lanka

Tsunami Rehabilitation, also known as "Thooku" (Website www.thooku.org) was formed in response to SOS calls from aid workers running Tsunami Refugee Camps in Sri Lanka. These aid workers highlighted the desperate need to provide more care to the hundreds of homeless, destitute and orphaned children.

We then set up the UK based registered charity "Tsunami Rehabilitation" to build the foundation for this long term project and prepare it for receiving children who were in need of care.

"Thooku" means "to carry" or "to lift", and is the name given to one of the youngest boys by the caretakers.

We have housed 30 children in pilgrimage quarters in close proximity to the Thiruketheeswaram temple where there

are also a school and other local amenities. This will be temporary stay for them while we fund raise and construct a new purpose built home for them. The children are aged between 3 and 14, boys and girls. Some of them are orphans, some have been abandoned by their parents and others were displaced even before the Tsunami. What is common to them all is that they are in great need of help.

The children arrived there in June 2005 and are settling into their new surroundings in Thiruketheeswaram. They attend the local village school (Gowri Ambal School) and play in the safe confines of the temple. A park with swings and slides etc. is being built now. They swim in the local "Palavi" sacred river and attend the local temple. We hope to care for 100 children of both sexes, and we would need two homes.

Each home would cost around £ 95,000. One of the homes is nearing completion. Unfortunately we are unable to complete this without further funds. We have raised up to £ 60,000 so far and still need £ 35,000. We need your help and assistance immediately. £ 10,000 was donated by the Lions Club of Sudbury and £ 21,000 was donated by NIKE in the Netherlands.

The cost of adopting a child is only £ 20.00 a month. All donations are appreciated

Payments to:
Tsunami Rehabilitation
Nat West Bank, Account No. 46525068 Sort code: 60-13-26, Loughton Branch, 102 High Street, Loughton, Essex IG1 4HT. Please contact Dr. J. Namasivayam on 0208 505 4725 for further details.

Guru Samarpanam

A concert by
Smt. Sivasakthi Sivanesan at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London.

What a treat! A packed audience were witness to an enchanting evening by UK's foremost Carnatic musician, Smt. Sivasakthi Sivanesan. As a teacher par excellence, the connoisseurs of classical music have seen Smt. Sivanesan lend her voice to several arangetrams. Last night, however, was her day. After a gap of nearly 20 years, she gave a concert allowing a rare insight into her genius and vast repertoire.

Guru Samarpanam, as the performance was aptly named, was a homage to Smt. Sivanesan's Gurus, many of whom are the legends of Carnatic music. An inspiring Guru herself, it was obvious that this superb artist has been able to learn from several schools of Carnatic music, each with their own differences and uniqueness, which she was able to present very ably to a greatly involved audience.

The first half consisted of very rare ragas, starting with Lalgudi's Charukesi varnam, moving to Dikshithar's Ekadhantham Bhajeham in Bilahari. Her rendering of Tyagaraja's asaveri krithi Maapaala Velasi Ike pleased the audience no end, while Ranganayakam in Nayaki did full justice to the magnificent ragam. The sheer poetry of Gopalakrishna Bharathi's Thiruvadi Charanam where the composer surrenders to the Lord and pleads with him to take him away forever and granting him the boon of not being reborn, was elucidated with great aplomb, invoking the philosophy and feeling with equal measure. The fast Nenarunchara gave a fitting end to the first half of the concert.

The second half saw her begin with Vidulaku Brokedha, the magnum-opus of Tyagaraja in Mayamaalavagowla, making it the main piece of the concert. And what a wonderful piece it was. Ably supported by Sri Balu Raghuraman on the violin, the raga alapana explored the depth and breadth of maayamalavagowla, while the thani avartanam was an energetic display of fantastic percussion between Sri Balachandar on the Mridangam, Sri Bangalore Prakash on the Ghatam and Sri Chidambaranathan on the Morsing. Thereafter, the delighted audience got a chance to participate with their requests. Smt. Sivanesan indulged them with a dazzling command of languages including two songs in Malayalam and one in Kannada. Of note was the Sarangan Marugane, a composition of her Guru, the Late Sri Veeramani Iyer. A ragamalika with 16 ragas, with two ragas in one line...this song was a true testimonial to the dexterity of the artist to switch ragas with such ease and aplomb. Sollavallayo, a Bharathiar composition set to tune in Keeravani, by her current Guru, Prof. TV Gopalakrishnan brought out the unique style of this genius.

A very emotional Smt. Sivanesan thanked her Gurus and the audience for their support for her through the years and concluded her concert with a Thillana in Brindavani taught to her by Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna.

It was a memorable evening, with an enormous range of music, from the serious to the semi-classical, from the very traditional to the mild and of course, a concert that saw Smt. Sivanesan as a performer first and a teacher next, rather than the other way around.

We have been promised many more performances of this great artist and hope that she will continue to delight the UK and other international audiences for years to come.

My Friend Siva

Mr. Thananayagam Sivananthan
25-12-1935 to 17-2-2006

I cannot believe that Siva Sivanantha, a man full of life, has left us. I was very sad and shocked to be informed on the morning of Friday, 17th February 2006 that Siva had passed away in his sleep the previous night at home in Croydon, Surrey. He had some health crises over the last seven years but on each occasion he responded well to treatment and bounced back to his energetic self. During the past few months he had been poorly for longer periods but neither his doctors nor those close to him expected his end so suddenly at the age of 70, leaving behind his wife Sri Rajadevi.

Siva was born into a Jaffna family in Malaya. At the age of 10 he was sent to Ceylon for a good education under the guardianship of an uncle. On his father's insistence that Siva should have a thorough grounding in Tamil and Hinduism, he first went to Jaffna Hindu College. After two years there he moved to St. Thomas College, Colombo, as a boarder and in 1957 entered the University of Ceylon to study Engineering. When he entered the Engineering Faculty in 1958 I had just graduated in Engineering and was employed as an Instructor (teaching assistant) and Siva was one of my students. However, even if we had been pursuing completely different careers at different times, we would have met, owing to our common interests, and become good friends as we did.

Siva was very interested in music and dance and he learnt to play the violin. At the university he was fully involved in all activities connected with the performing arts: music, dance and drama and this involvement strengthened and continued up to his last breath. My mutual interest with him was mainly in Karnatic music, enjoying it and performing it, but Siva's interest was much wider. In addition to a great love for music and a good knowledge of it, he was particularly interested in the proper presentation of performances of music dance and drama and had very creative ideas on stage decoration, stage management, stage lighting, sound balance etc., all of which he learnt by volunteering himself to various societies, to begin with, in Colombo. His involvement was such that even years later people recall him and acknowledge his contribution.

I moved to the UK in the early sixties and Siva did the same in the middle sixties but we were in different places. As a Civil Engineer he joined a British firm of Consulting Engineers in London. Seeing that no cultural activity was going on at the firm Siva, this young man from Ceylon, started a music appreciation society which was enthusiastically embraced by his colleagues, all native British. They gathered at different homes with members socialising and listening to Western classical music from records and discussing the music.

The firm recognised Siva's personality, ability and hard work and gave him rapid promotions and in 1975 sent him as a Resident Engineer on a water treatment project in Ahwaz, the oil capital of Iran. As Siva and his wife Sri were living in an English-speaking expatriate community, he formed an amateur dramatics group and produced and directed several plays, the most ambitious of which was Alan Ayckbourn's comedy 'How the other half loves'. The players and stagehands were mainly British with some Americans and the play was a great success. Siva was also a favourite Father Christmas for the expatriate children and this was rather special for him because his birthday was Christmas day itself.

From Iran Siva was sent to Syria in 1977, where he spent a culturally uneventful year and a half and returned to the UK. Then his employers sponsored him on an advanced one-year course in water treatment at the University of Newcastle.

In 1980 we found ourselves together in Singapore, where he was posted by his UK employers as their Chief Resident Engineer on a water treatment project. We soon joined an orchestral group with him playing the violin and me the veena. With Siva's ideas on organisation and presentation we felt that we should form our own group and we did this calling it the Singapore Karnatic Orchestra. It was then that I fully realised the energy and enthusiasm of the man. He somehow networked through many people and recruited, within a short time, over 20 members to play various instruments. Some of them were mature women and men who had not played their instruments regularly for some years while the others were youngsters. Thus the orchestra rekindled the musical interest in many. We practised regularly and shaped the orchestra to performing level. We gave many public performances and radio and television recordings. I looked after the music, training the players, and Siva did all the organising and presentation. Some of the features of presentation he introduced were later copied by other organisations in Singapore.

Siva's work took him to Brunei in 1985 and there he directed and produced some short English plays and actively participated in the Rotary Club, the branch of which recognised his qualities and elected him president in an unusually short time. The Sultan of Brunei had a special interest in the Baddas Water Project which Siva started and completed as Chief Resident Engineer. The Sultan himself frequently visited the project and began to refer to it as Siva's Project.

In 1989 Siva's employers moved him to Hong Kong which, unlike Singapore, was almost a clean slate for his interests and there his talents fully blossomed. He mobilised the interested local South Indians, Sri Lankans and others to form the singing, orchestral and theatre groups Gananjali, Nadhanjali and Natakanjali and organised local performances, with Siva himself playing the violin in the singing and orchestral groups. Under the auspices of Gananjali and Nadhanjali he organised concerts by many first-rate musicians such as Lalgudi Jayaraman, TV Sankaranarayanan, Bushany Kalyanaraman and Mandolin Srinivas, all with their accompanists. Siva himself personally accommodated and looked after most of these artists. Over 150 performances, mostly concerts, but some lecture demonstrations and workshops, were presented and some of these were coordinated with similar promoters in Singapore, Australia and the US.

In the Natakanjali group the multi-talented Siva produced and directed Tamil plays mainly with Sri Lankan Tamils. Among the members of Gananjali was the young Indian lady Suja Srinivas, who had a thorough training in Karnatic music and a delicate voice but had not had the opportunity of giving public performance. Siva advised her on aspects of public performance, planned concert programmes and, making use of his contacts among the musical societies in Chennai, arranged many concert performances there by Suja during the December music seasons.

Owing to ill health Siva returned to the UK from Hong Kong in 1997 but after a few months took on a WHO project in

Mumbai, India and spent two years and another period of six months there.

In addition to organising and presenting music and drama Siva edited the music magazine 'Ganam' in Hong Kong and wrote articles and reviews on music and dance in several publications including 'Sruti' and the 'Tamil Times', as readers would know.

From 1980 to 98 he went every year to Chennai to attend the December concerts, which he loved, and the visits also enabled him to develop and maintain close contact with leading musicians. When I joined him on my less frequent visits to Chennai we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly attending some concerts together and others separately but invariably met to have a post-concert discussion late into the night, often with other friends. Siva was then in full flow and I treasure the memories of these occasions. He had an intrinsic grasp of the overall effect of a performance.

Siva's ill health prevented him from visiting Chennai after December 2002 but he always listened and watched the excerpts of the important concerts beamed from Chennai on satellite TV, including those during last December. In recent years the first time I went to Chennai without Siva being there was last December and I missed his company. However, we always enjoyed our regular telephone conversations mostly about music, the last one a week before he passed away. I shall miss my dear friend and remember him always by my private nickname for him - the Great Impresario.

- Dr. S. Sriharan

Mr. Saravanamuthu Stanislaus M.B.E.

– An Appreciation

Memories are all that remains of Mr. Stanislaus who answered the call of the The Almighty, after a prolonged and bitterly fought battle with a cruel disease. His death is a great loss for his beloved family and the members of the South London Tamil Welfare Group, which he fathered and served for the last 12 years as Chairperson.

He was born on 7th May 1929 and passed away on Friday, 3rd February 2006. His wife predeceased him in 1999. He leaves behind two sons, four daughters, eleven grandchildren and one great grandchild.. He was a devoted teacher at Uduvil Girls College, Jaffna, and a witty and jovial person who was liked by staff and students.

Whilst in Jaffna, he had been the President of the Northern Province Fisheries Corporation (CEYNOR), that was functioning in Karainagar with the financial support of the Norwegian Government. Though I had no personal dealings with him in Sri Lanka, I am aware of the above as he succeeded my brother-in-law the late Mr. K.S.Ponnuthurai who was the President after his retirement from the post of Senior Assistant Commissioner, Co-operative Development Department.

I came know him after coming to London and was enrolled as a member of the SLTWG in 2000. I was a member of the Group till 2005, when I resigned due to ill health and difficulty in travelling from Chelsea to Wimbledon to take part in its activities.

I met Mr Stanislaus for the first time at one of the meetings and later at get-togethers and found him to be jovial, friendly and working hard to uplift the lives of the expatriate Tamils in London, especially those residing around Wimbledon. He joined SLTWG in 1990 and became Chairman on the demise of its founder member/chairman in 1994. From that time, he had unrelentingly and devotedly worked for the members and other Tamils in general. There are so many who would have benefited from his sincere advice and help in solving their problems – in short he gave his life for the cause which he believed was right and fought for the poor since 1994. His wealth of experience and natural abilities were recognised and he was appointed a member of the Refugee Council, a stakeholder in the Home Office National Asylum Support Forum and also served on the Advisory Panel of the Immigration Services Commission (OISC). At public meeting held at the London Muthumari Amman Temple, Tooting, he was decorated with a Golden threaded shawl in appreciation of his services to the expatriate Tamils. He was awarded an MBE in 2003 by Her Majesty the Queen, one of the greatest honours granted to a Sri Lankan Tamil by the British Government.

A lot more can be written about him, but space prohibits me from writing at length, except to say that his life was dedicated to ameliorating the lives of Tamils and his memory will live on. He was a person dedicated to the cause of the refugees and the welfare of the members of the Tamil community in Britain. He had very good rapport with the Merton Council, the Home Office, Members of Parliament and was able to get many concessions and benefits for the Tamils. The organisation under his leadership provided the following services to the Tamil Community: advice and support services, immigration advice, welfare benefit advice, housing advice and also conducted classes in English, ICT, job search skills, after school support classes, supplementary classes and many other community development services for older people, family support services, health promotion, arts development and youth development.

Even though Mr Stanislaus is no more, he has left behind a lasting legacy and will be with us in spirit for many years to come, continuing to be an inspiration for the South London Tamil Welfare Group and the wider Tamil community as a whole.

His mortal remains were brought to Merton Hall, 76 Kingston Road, South Wimbledon on 11th February 2006 and were kept for viewing between 9.00am to 11.00am and was taken to St. Cecilia's Church, Epsom Road, Lower Morden for an Eucharistic Celebration and was buried at Morden and Battersea Cemetery at 2.00pm the same day.

The large number of mourners of all faith and races who gathered to pay their last respects at Merton Hall, Church and Cemetery proved beyond doubt the respect and regard that they had for him.Stanislaus. The memorial service for Mr Stanislaus was held on Saturday 4th March 2006 at Merton Hall, Kingston Road.

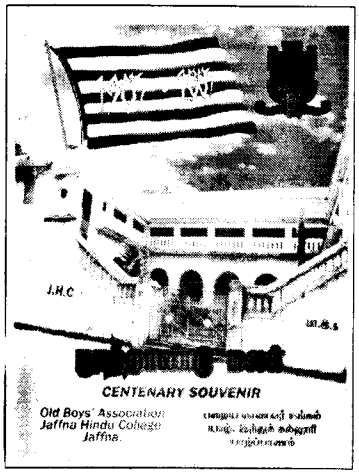
His life was gentle and the elements so mixed in him that, nature might stand up and say to the world – "THIS WAS A MAN" – William Shakespeare.

May His Soul Rest In Peace.

- M. Balasundram.

BOOK REVIEW

JAFFNA HINDU COLLEGE O.B.A CENTENARY SOUVENIR



The first week of March saw the Cumaraswamy hall filled to capacity for the OBA's centenary celebrations and the release of the 278 page colourful centenary souvenir of the JHC OBA. The novelty of the ceremony was the honouring of old boys and former teachers who have crossed the age of 75 on the centenary day – 9th January 2005. Although circumstances beyond control delayed the function it was a worthy venture that has brought all the activities and the achievements of our Alma Mater from 1890 to 2005 in one volume which could serve as an information source for our future generations. The portraits of all former Principals, felicitation messages from five earlier Principals, detailed recollections of old boys of different periods, historical documentation in English and Tamil and the Master Plan with descriptive drawings for the future development of the college add colour to the souvenir.

The parent OBA that was started in Jaffna on the 9th of January 1905 is rooted firmly at the base with its global branches in England, Canada, Australia, Germany, Switzerland and the USA in addition to the active one in Colombo whose detailed portrayals go as role models to show how a dedicated Alumnus could continue to sustain the multi-faceted growth of our beloved Alma Mater The Principal, the OBAs and the souvenir committee is worthy of all praise for this well printed centenary souvenir – a worthy addition to our global Alumnus.

V.Sivasupramaniam
Old boy and former teacher
1940 – 1972
Seychelles

Australian Newsletter

Olympics and Commonwealth Games reached the shores of Kangaroo land within a short span of six years and hosting such international events were a gargantuan task, but Australia proudly excelled on both occasions. Fighter jets and choppers are circling Melbourne's skies during the current Commonwealth Games and the security arrangements for the event are grandiose with a 75km no-fly zone in place to shield the city. According to Australia's Attorney-General, $85 million was allocated to fund a range of security measures, including the specialist troop unit with a contingent of 1,200 troops joining 13,000 strong Victorian Police, 5000 private security guards and squads of counter-terrorism experts protecting the event.

Eelam Tamil Association in Victoria conducted a variety of social and sporting events during the past month and most notable was the fundraising event organised in collaboration with OSA's (Old Students' association) in Melbourne in support of Muthuthamby Vithyasalai in Jaffna.

2006 seems to be an year of Miruthangam arangetrams in Melbourne. A glance through the events diary published in the fortnightly Eelamurasu reveals an unusually high number of Miruthangam arangetrams (not to mention other instrumental vocal and bharathanatya arangetrams have been scheduled for the remainder of the year. No doubt, the arangetram boom is heartening, but one begins to wonder whether the true sprit of arangetrams is increasingly becoming diluted and whether the quality is being compromised for quantity. It is gradually becoming a trend to rope in renowned artistes from overseas, in particular from Chennai, for arangetram and other events and the latest being the tour of Unnikrishnan. Undoubtedly, Australian and New Zealand audience had the pleasurable melodious experience of Unnikrishnan on both the classical and light music scene.

Torrential rain lashed Australia's east coast with thousands cut off by floods in New South Wales and a mudslide that threatened homes in Queensland. Canberra residents were shaken a little but not stirred by an earthquake that centred about 60km from the nation's capital. Measuring 3.5 on the Richter scale, the quake was centred 8km southwest of the earthquake-prone town of Gunning.

- Sivasupramaniam Sitsabesan

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Programme, 8th April 2006 (Doors open at 5.30 p.m)

6 p.m. Vocal Musical Concert by V.K. MANIMARAN
Accompanists:- Balu Raghuraman (Violin),
M.Balachander (Mridangam) **& RR Prathap** (Ghatam)

7 p.m. Vocal Musical Concert
by KALAIMAMANI BHUSHANY KALYANARAMAN
Accompanists:- Balu Raghuraman (Violin), **M.Balachander** (Mridangam) **RR Prathap** (Ghatam) **& K Sithamparanathan** (Morsing)

Programme, 9th April 2006 (Doors open at 4.30 p.m.)

5 p.m. Winner of London Carnatic Music Idol Competition
Violin Duet : KUM LALITHA & KUM NANTHINI
Accompanists:- J Pathmanabhan (Mridangam)
& RN Prakash (Ghatam)

- Interval -

'Arunachala Kavirayar's
Rama Nadakam Isai Chithiram-
Compiled by SUKI SIVAM
Music by BHUSHANY KALYANARAMAN & V K MANIMARAN
Accompanists:- KT Sivaganeshan (Violin)
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